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Egyptian Urban Exigencies: Space, Governance and Structures of Meaning in a
Globalising Cairo

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in Global Studies

by

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June 2019

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ABSTRACT

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by

Roberta Duffield

Greater Cairo's claim as amongst the world's largest urban conglomerates demands discussion of its spatial organisation and governance. The challenges of pollution, overcrowding and poverty are unavoidable when 22.8 million citizens aspire to cohabit one space, historically lacking robust mechanisms for formal civic engagement and enforcing the social accountability of successive national governments. These issues of urban inequality and *le droit à la ville* became drivers of social anger during the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. A period of reduced governmental oversight on spatial ownership and a newly galvanised civil society following these protests opened a brief window for a new mode of urban citizenship that demanded a more equitable urban existence for Cairo's inhabitants. This moment, however, appears to have ended. The installation of the Abd al-Fatah al-Sisi administration in 2014 proposes a new period of state-led politicised urban development for Cairo's future, adjourned during the years of regime change following the revolution. The current governmental vision for the Egyptian capital coalesces around notions of a global city that demonstrates the urban trappings of a locus of international flows of capital, business and tourism. This includes the construction of high-end commercial and residential areas, mass

slum clearances and the reimagination of the city's multiple architectural heritages as 'open-air museums'. Inspiration is drawn from the economic prosperity of rising eastern metropolises particularly Dubai, appropriated as an emulative model for Arab success. The apex of these ambitions is arguably the New Administrative Capital, currently under construction 45-kilometres away from Cairo which proposes a 'smart', green, connected city as the new seat of Egyptian national prestige in the twenty-first century.

The findings of this thesis are based upon research from a five-month period of participant observation in Cairo that informed a familiarity with area and populations of enquiry, informal interviews with knowledge stakeholders involved in urban issues, and a range of primary and secondary written sources. They reveal a paradox at the heart of current hegemonic planning logics which proclaim a better Cairo through de-densification and development, but with little introspection on its inhabitants' immediate needs or learning from previous urban development in the city. Globality as intimated through the built environment manifests as a hollow visuality of cosmopolitan modernity orientated around elite consumer practices, informed by neoliberal subjectivities and private-sector economics. Practical considerations of infrastructural investment and adequate social housing projects are side-lined by a myopic commitment to the aesthetics of stature as a short-cut to success. This is upheld by the Egyptian Armed Forces reasserted role as a prominent economic beneficiary in Egypt's speculative elite real estate and development sectors. The spectre of 2011's mass uprising runs throughout Cairo's urban development, consciously rationalised in the securitisation of symbolic sites of revolution, or indirectly perpetuated through projects that promote a class-based usability that corresponds to politicised and moralised narratives of risk and identity

regarding visibility in public spaces. Without a comprehensive long-term solution to complex urban needs and a mounting public debt incurred through poorly-conceived megaprojects, the future appears set to engender further civil dispossession from Cairo's urban environment.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction	2
A. Key Investigation	2
B. Thesis Organisation.....	2
C. Defining the Investigation: What is Cairo?.....	5
1. Cairo as the Primate Metropolis	6
2. Cairo's Urban Climacteric.....	8
3. Cairo as a Global City.....	12
D. A Genealogy of Politicised Urbanism: A Conversation with the Global Modern.....	14
E. 2011: A New Mode of Urban Citizenship	18
II. Remaking the Old: Downtown Cairo.....	23
A. Chapter Introduction: Downtown Cairo in the Post-Revolution Moment.....	23
1. New Military Urbanism	24
2. Sisi's War on Terror	26
3. <i>Al-Ḥamla al-'Amniyya</i> : The Scourge of Street Vending	28
4. Coffee Shops and Revolution	30
5. Cultural Constriction	32
6. Museum for Ghosts?.....	33
B. Downtown Historic: Bohemia and the <i>Belle Époque</i>	34
1. Downtown in Decline	36

C. The Heritisation of Khedival Cairo.....	40
1. Nostalgia as Utopia.....	43
2. The Golden Age, Revisited.....	45
D. Inscribing Heritage into Law	50
1. Foundations for Downtown's Future	53
E. Al Ismaelia for Real Estate Investment.....	55
1. A Cultural Vision for Development	57
2. Gentrification, Interrupted	59
3. Identity Formation	63
F. Chapter Conclusion	66
III. Making the New: Visions for a Global City.....	68
A. Chapter Introduction: New City Rising	68
1. Militarised Capitalism, <i>Infītāh</i> and Beyond.....	68
B. Informality, Mega-Projects and the Call of the Desert	76
1. The New Urban Communities Authority	82
C. Structures of Globality and their Meaning.....	87
1. Cosmopolitanism and Post-Heritage Modalities	90
2. Globalising Cities and the Dubai Effect	93
D. Cairene Fever Dreams: Planning Vision Logics.....	97
E. The New Administrative Capital.....	105
1. Constructing the Capital: Who and How?	108
2. Political Security and Revolution	113
3. Connected, Green and Global in the <i>Madīna Zhakīyya</i>	115

F. Chapter Conclusion	122
IV. Conclusion	126
References.....	133

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Proposed Projects and Credentials of the New Administrative Capital	112
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACUD	Administrative Capital for Urban Development (<i>al- 'āṣima al- 'idārīyya lil tanmīyya al- 'umrānīyya</i>)
AUC	American University in Cairo
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CAPMAS	Egyptian Central Agency for Public Mobilisation and Statistics (<i>al-jihāz al-markazī lil-ta 'bi 'a al- 'āma wa-al- 'ihṣā ' al-miṣri</i>)
CCP	Capital City Partners
CEDEJ	Centre d'études et de documentation économiques, juridiques et sociales (Centre for Social, Judicial and Economic Documentation and Study)
CFLD	China Fortune Land Development
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CLUSTER	Cairo Lab for Urban Studies, Training and Environmental Research
CSCEC	China State Construction Engineering Corporation
D-CAF	Downtown Contemporary Arts Festival
EAAF	Engineering Authority of the Armed Forces (<i>al-hayy 'a al-handasīyya lil-quwwāt al-musalaḥa</i>)
EAF	Egyptian Armed Forces
ECA	Egyptian Colloquial Arabic
EGP	Egyptian Pounds
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GCR	Greater Cairo Region
GCUDS	Greater Cairo Urban Development Strategy
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH
GOPP	General Organisation for Physical Planning (<i>al-hayy 'a al- 'āma lil-takhṭīṭ al- 'umrānī</i>)
GTZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
IBM	International Business Machines Corporation
ICT	Information and communication technology
ISDF	Informal Settlements Development Fund (<i>ṣandūq taṭwīr al-manāṭiq al- 'ashwā 'īya</i>)
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRB	International Review Board
JICA	Japanese International Cooperation Agency
KFC	Kentucky Fried Chicken
MA	Masters of Arts
MHUUC	Ministry of Housing, Utilities and Urban Communities
MIHC	Misr Insurance Holding Company
MREA	Misr Real Estate Assets
MSA	Modern Standard Arabic
NDP	National Democratic Party
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NOUH	National Organisation for Urban Harmony (<i>al-jihāz al-qawmī lil-tansīq al-ḥadārī</i>)

NUCA	New Urban Communities Authority (<i>hayy'at al-mujtam'āt al-'umrānīyya al-jadīda</i>)
SCA	Supreme Council of Antiquities
SCAF	Supreme Council of the Armed Forces
SHP	Social Housing Project
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Program
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollars

NOTE ON ARABIC TRANSCRIPTIONS AND TRANSLATION

Throughout this thesis I have used the standardised mixed digraphic and diacritical system ALA-LC (American Library Association-Library of Congress) to transcribe Arabic terms into romanised script.

I followed the AP (Associated Press) stylebook to determine when transcriptions should be used. AP convention states that conventional English spellings for well-known proper nouns should be used in favour of directly transcribed Arabic words to provide clarity to Anglophone readers. For example, Egypt's capital city remains Cairo, rather than its Arabic name al-qāhira. President Nasser is used rather than President Naṣr, but Naṣr City is used rather than Nasser City, following the most commonly accepted convention for each respective person or place, even though Nasser and Naṣr correspond to the same word in Arabic. If multiple English spellings exist and it is unclear which is the most commonly cited, I use the spelling closest to ALA-LC transcription but without diacritic marks for the sake of combined accuracy and continuity. For example, 'Abdin is used instead of Abdeen, following the Arabic transcription 'Abdīn. Terms such as *'ashwā'ī* or *infītāḥ*, however, are transcribed to convey their precise Arabic meanings relevant to this thesis enquiry. Translations and explanations of Arabic transcriptions are given within the thesis text and are highlighted in italics throughout.

AP style also dictates that any romanised Arabic name containing a definite article (al-) retains this article if the full name is stated, but drops it if only the surname is used. For example, Abd al-Fatah al-Sisi retains its definite article on the surname, but is omitted in references to President Sisi. This rule does not apply to in-text citations of referenced authors with Arabic surnames containing a definite article. These surname-only citations retain their definite article in order to provide bibliographical clarity to the reader.

The majority of Arabic transcriptions are in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), unless it is more appropriate to give the Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA) rendition. For example, ECA *'ahwa* is used for 'coffee shop', as the MSA term *maqḥā* would only be used in formal print and is not used by Egyptians to refer to the specific type of café establishment that this thesis discusses.

All Arabic sources listed in the References section were translated by myself.

<i>Our night is filthy</i>	ليلتنا طين
<i>Do you know that the Nile just drips water?</i>	وهل تعلم أن النيل بقي رشاح
<i>The air is polluted, and the cost of living too</i>	والجو أصبح بيئة والعيشة ولعة
<i>And the hearts of the honest are raging for the country</i>	والشرفا قلوبهم عالبلد والعة
<i>You are massacring them, like the Mamluks of old</i>	وانت عاملهم مذبحه ولا بتاعة القلعة
<i>The economy is in shambles</i>	والإقتصاد سداح
<i>And thievery has become a battle</i>	والسرقة بقت كفاح
<i>Egypt is just for the tourists</i>	ومصر متاحة بس للسياح
<i>And all the land here is for sale</i>	وعرض البلد بقي مستباح

- Excerpt from *Fī 'īd milādak al-kām wa-saba'īn* (On Your Seventy-Something Birthday, a poem to Hosni Mubarak), Ahmed Fouad Negm, 2010

I. Introduction

A. Key Investigation

In this thesis project I explore how urban development in contemporary Cairo informs a wider picture of Egypt's political, economic and social conditions and its interpretative relationships with the global and the modern. Governance through urban development is integral to the modern cityscape, from physical spatial controls to attempts to shape norms and behaviours to demographic manipulation. The socio-political goals of a government can be evident in the configurations of towns, cities and capitals, which in turn influence how populations interact and behave, creating a 'politicised urbanism' that aspires to determine social outcomes (Selim 2015). From a Global Studies perspective, this is also considered through Egypt's negotiation with the global modern as a marker of authenticity and legitimacy, given Cairo's status as a globalising Middle Eastern and African mega-city with a historically influential status that draws on its interconnections at the regional and international level, amplified by the city's integration into processes of neoliberal globalisation. In light of Egypt's post-2011 political instability of regime change, now checked by President Abd al-Fatah al-Sisi's entrenchment of power and a reasserted military presence in the nation's political and economic arenas, a new phase worthy of investigation can be identified. This includes the current administration's stated goal to create Cairo as a global city, considered in relation to the city's local realities.

B. Thesis Organisation

This introduction sets out the paradigms of my investigation, beginning with methods used and limitations of the study. I define 'Cairo' as a geographic space of enquiry and outline some of its relevant urban, demographic and economic characteristics as Egypt's

premier metropolis. This provide a local context for the thesis' investigation into how urban needs and priorities are assessed in relation to present city-wide development visions for a global Cairo. I then consider Cairo's status as a global city and provide a brief historical overview of several interpretations of political urbanism which reflect historic governmental dispositions towards the global modern and efforts to assert Egypt within the world order. I outline the Egyptian Revolution of 2011's galvanisation of new forms of urban citizenship and notions of the right to the city, providing the relevant contemporary socio-political background for this thesis.

Chapter One addresses the regeneration of Cairo's Downtown with particular regards to the post-1990s heritage movement that seeks to promote and restore the *belle époque* built environment. Heritisation can be viewed as a hegemonic expression of national identity and spatial ownership expressed through a nostalgic reading of Khedival Egypt. This is amplified by discriminatory architectural patronage and the reassertion of norms of private ownership and spatial exclusivity legitimated by a perceived hybrid cosmopolitan and authentically Egyptian urbanism, congruent with Egypt's neoliberal moment. Concurrent with this is Downtown and Tahrir's Square's currency as the site of the 2011 Revolution, internalised by a current administration that both champions and owes its position to regime change precipitated by popular protest, simultaneously apprehensive of similar future civil expression that may displace their authority. The area's cultural and social institutions and meeting places begin to occupy a contradictory place, liable to governmental suspicion as sites of dissent, whilst also discriminately appropriated as markers of heritage and culture to promote Cairo as part of a wider global city vision. A closer examination of the Al Ismaelia for Real Estate Investment company, the premier private developer in Downtown Cairo, illustrates this tension. Al Ismaelia's projects

demonstrate the primacy of private capital and its associated cultural and consumer-orientated production in reshaping symbolic urban patrimony in relation to the global. At the heart of this is the paradox of Downtown's much-needed architectural restoration and preservation and the needs of Cairene residents, witnessing the generation of a proto-gentrification that relies on social capital and paradoxical celebration of Downtown's bohemian cultural currency and architecturally exclusivist history to maintain spatial boundaries.

Chapter Two takes a broader examination of the current administration's development vision for Greater Cairo, considering successive recent city-wide regeneration plans since the late-Mubarak period and their reassertion in the present moment. It focuses on Cairo's new-build peripheral settlements and the New Administrative Capital mega-project as a proposed solution to the city's population density and unhealthy congestion, as assumed to be represented by Cairo's many informal slums. These two urban forms increasingly define urbanity in the metropolis, illustrating a growing socially polarised society unaddressed by state-led social urban initiatives. Cosmopolitan modernity is intimated by superficial markers of globality and orientated around consumer practice, inspired by Dubai's economic success interpreted as an emulative aesthetic form. As well as reinforcing the importance of private and foreign investment capital in Sisi's Egypt, Chapter Two's investigation illustrates the newly reasserted primacy of the Egyptian Armed Forces' (EAF) position as the nation's prime political and economic author that is rapidly capitalising on its ownership of Egypt's prime commodity; surplus desert land, driving military appropriation of the construction and urban development sectors. This has ramifications for the political and social urban reenvisioning of Cairo and the New Administrative Capital as a globally-oriented figurehead for regime longevity.

C. Defining the Investigation: What is Cairo?

Where to draw the Egyptian capital's boundaries is much debated, as is the case for most of the world's sprawling mega-cities that grow rapidly, outpacing authoritative oversight. In Cairo the ambiguity is compounded by the fragmented nature of municipal governance: there is no official administrative body in charge of the Greater Cairo Region (GCR) nor one governmentally-sanctioned boundary (Sims, 2016; Sims, 2011; United Nations Human Settlement Programme, 2012). For the purposes of this thesis, I consider 'Cairo' in terms of the Greater Cairo Region which includes the Cairo, Giza and Qalyubiyya Governorates,¹ following the definition set by urban planner and Egyptian government urban advisor David Sims (2011) and the area of study proposed by the Japanese International Cooperation Agency's (JICA) Sustainable Development of the Greater Cairo Region report (Japan International Cooperation Agency [JICA], 2009). This comprises a contiguous metropolitan area of 4,367 square kilometres straddling the Nile just below the delta region in northern Egypt and extending into the river's agricultural plains and desert areas to the east and west. It includes the dense urban centre (composed of Cairo Governorate; Giza City, part of Giza Governorate; and Shubra al-Khayma, part of Qalyubiyya Governorate), the peri-urban semi-rural districts found in Giza and Qalyubiyya governorates, and the new-build satellite settlements that intersperse Cairo's periphery.

¹ Governorates (*muḥāfazāt*, sing. *muḥafaza*) are the top administrative division in Egypt. There are 27 governorates in Egypt, four of which (Cairo, Port Said, Suez and Alexandria) are considered urban, and the remainder rural or mixed. Generally, urban governorates are divided into urban districts (*qism*, pl. *'aqsām*) and areas (*ḥayy*, pl. *'aḥyā'*), then urban neighbourhoods (*shayākha*, pl. *shayākhāt*). Rural governorates are divided into rural districts (*markaz*, pl., *marākiz*), then administrative villages (*qariya*, pl. *qurā*). Other divisional markers also exist, including municipalities (*majlis al-mudun*, pl. *majālis al-mudun*), sub-districts, police-administered areas, and unorganised areas. The GCR comprises 235 administrative units, 163 which are *qariya* with extremely limited administrative power. See Sims, 2016, Chapter 2 'The Existing Governance System for Greater Cairo' or Nada, 2014 for further detail.

This is a varied urban landscape: Sims (2011) describes modern Cairo as ‘three cities in one’, the formal, informal (defined by their status as lawful according to real-estate and land usage laws of the time), and the new desert cities. Cairo Governate itself refers only to the older east bank settlement and the islands of Zamalek and Rawda. This does not represent the metropole as a lived reality; the capital’s vital functions including public transport systems, government buildings, embassies, residential and commercial neighbourhoods and educational and healthcare institutes are distributed throughout the conglomeration, thus informing a more comprehensive and relevant framework of investigation regarding Cairo’s urban environment with regards to this thesis.

1. Cairo as the Primate Metropolis

“What happens in Cairo [is] a prime test of what will eventually happen in the rest of the country. If Cairo is Egypt's showpiece to the world, she is also Egypt's testing ground for the future. What trials has she faced thus far and how has she sought to meet their challenge?”

- Janet L. Abu-Lughod, 1971, 222

Cairo is the undisputed urban powerhouse of the nation, described by urban planner David Sims as a ‘primate’ mega-city – one that disproportionately exceeds national counterparts in terms of size, usually with an associated outsized political, economic and cultural influence over the nation (Sims, 2016). It stands unrivalled as Egypt’s singular metropolis that accommodates an uneven concentration of almost all state institutions, a national industrial base and other major economic activities, particularly those orientated around the international and high-end markets. Publishing houses, media outlets, film studios and around half of the nation’s hospital beds, pharmacies and university places are

contained within the capital (United Nations Human Settlement Programme, 2012; Sims, 2011).

According to different estimates, Cairo's economic output represents between 31 and 40-percent of Egyptian GDP and constitutes more than half of the annual national industrial product compared to other Egyptian metropolitan centres; the second city of Alexandria contributes only 14.5-percent. Its populus includes around 40-percent of the manufacturing sector workforce, 46-percent of those working in financial and touristic services, 43-percent of the nation's public sector jobs and 40-percent in the private sector. The specialized industrial poles of Egypt's Delta and northern coast—such as Damietta's furniture or al-Mahalla al-Kubra's textiles—are integrated into commercial and production chains largely dedicated to serving Cairo rather than independent economic activity. They supply the capital's consumer market and industrial quarters such as Helwan or Tenth of Ramadan where products may be sent to be finished, capitalising on Cairo's large labour reserves. The city's economic primacy is further reinforced as the location of the national stock exchange, banking headquarters and government and international agencies, and relative proximity to the Suez Canal, under three-hours away, making it the natural base for most economic activities that aspire to compete globally. Indeed, country-wide foreign participation across Egypt's economic sectors has almost exclusively benefited the capital, concentrated at 86-percent in the Greater Cairo Region (General Organisation for Physical Planning [GOPP] et al., 2012/2014; Vignal & Denis, 2006; Sims 2016; Sims, 2011).

In 2017 Egypt's population numbered 92 million, with an estimated 22.8 million—24.7-percent of the national total—residing within the GCR. Egypt's second largest city of Alexandria stands far behind at 5.2 million residents. According to CAPMAS, national

annual population growth is 2.4-percent, around double the average of other developing countries. *Reuters* reports that Cairo's populace grew by 500,000 in 2017; more than any other city in the world, with government officials claiming the city's populus will double within in the next few decades (Gaballa, 2017). It is currently the first and second largest city in the Middle East region and African continent respectively, and is estimated to retain its place as the world's thirteenth largest urban agglomeration by 2025 (Hawksworth et al., 2009). These rapidly growing statistics mean revisiting academic investigation of Cairo's urbanity is both timely and necessary.

2. Cairo's Urban Climacteric

Given Cairo's attributes as described above, questions of urban development, planning and realities are thus paramount to the future functionality of the city and liveability for its residents. Cairo as an overcrowded, dirty city is well-established in literature, as Sims (2011, 15) delineates in his critiques of 'Cairo as Monster and Unmitigated Mess' and 'Cairo as Part of the World of Slums'. As he states, "the Egyptian middle classes and intelligentsia, as well as the foreign community, love to deplore what Cairo has become. Crowds and congestion, pollution, garbage, chaos, gridlocked traffic, horrendous architecture, and no green space, all are endlessly invoked to describe the mess that Cairo has become". Media shorthand for Cairo's untamed urbanity is oft-invoked: consider the visual trope of the Pyramids of Giza succumbing to creeping urban sprawl and an adjacent Pizza Hut and KFC, expressed by Mohammad Elshahed's (2016, 279) statement that "the city's historic monuments are drowning in an urban topography that resulted from impoverished governance and improvised urban expansion". Notable too is the media over-production around Cairo's *zabbālīn* ('people of the garbage', or garbage collectors) of Manshiyyat Nasr (colloquially known as 'Garbage City'), a largely poor Christian

community which maintain livelihoods through the collection, sorting and recycling of the city's waste whilst living amongst accumulated refuse. The City of the Dead also features prominently; a sprawling necropolis in Cairo's Islamic quarter in which thousands of poor residents have made their home amongst its tombs and mausoleums. Despite these popular media vignettes that tend to focus on narratives of sensationalised impoverishment, there is no doubt that life in the Egyptian capital is one of grinding urban hardship for many, isolated from public services and sustainable means of subsistence. This is also holds true for more financially solvent citizens who also must contend with Cairo's infernal congestion, noise, unsafe levels of air purity, dilapidated urban fabric and high population density, presided over by indifferent or ineffectual state authorities.

Indeed, in 2018 UK environmental research centre Eco Experts declared Cairo the world's most polluted city based on aggregated metrics of air, light, and noise pollution; in particular its air purity is up to 14.2-times over the recommended safety level as recommended by the World Health Organisation (Whittaker-Wood, 2018). CAPMAS statistics of 2016 indicate that 18-percent of Cairo's residents live under the national poverty line – far lower than the 57-percent average for rural governorates (including the nation's highest levels of impoverishment in Asyut and Sohag both at 66-percent), but slightly higher than the urban governorates' average at 15-percent (Port Said being the nation's least impoverished at 6.7-percent) (Abushama, 2016). Furthermore, when disaggregated by district Cairo's poverty levels reveal a deeply polarised inequality. Cairo-based urban research and advocacy group TADAMUN (2019) reports that proportions of the population living beneath the poverty line within the GCR vary from 0.26 to 91.5-percent between neighbourhoods and in 2009 Cairo's Gini Coefficient was 0.397 – the highest level of inequality of all the country's governorates.

However, it is widely accepted amongst Cairo's urban researchers that these indicators misrepresent reality by setting poverty lines too lower to factor in costs of adequate living, particularly with regards to non-food needs such as housing, healthcare, education or transportation. Actual results are likely to be higher. This underestimation is particular acute in the GCR where CAPMAS census data and other household surveys routinely undercount the populations in informal areas due to the difficulty of obtaining data, poor administrative definitions of district boundaries that often discount Cairo's peripheries and more rural (and thus generally poorer) areas, and a tendency to downplay governmental failings (Sabry, 2010). Given that some 60-percent of the GRC's population is estimated to reside in informal areas, this constitutes a significant margin of error. Other indicators are subject to further obfuscation; for example, 99-percent of informal *shayākhāt* households are estimated to have access to electricity, which does not differentiate between legal and illegal connections to the grid. Around 97-percent are estimated to have access to piped water, but this does not account for quality of water or low pipe pressure which necessitate the purchase of pump mechanisms, storing water reserves in containers, or purchasing bottled water. Urban researcher Sarah Sabry demonstrates that whole neighbourhoods may be largely cut off from water during the hotter months of May through October due to low water pressure. This illustrates how underprivileged neighbourhoods may function as spatial poverty traps where despite their cheaper rent, already financially limited households must shoulder extra financial burdens to ameliorate their living conditions. For instance, government waste disposal agencies do not serve all areas of the city, meaning private services must be engaged if residents can afford it. Accumulated waste increases the likelihood of disease, generating the burden of medical bills and transport costs. The poorest informal areas are usually vastly underprovided for by health

or education facilities compared to their richer counterparts, meaning longer journeys must also be factored into household expenditure (TADAMUN, 2019).

These poor urban conditions are exacerbated by unevenly applied governmental urban investment. Within the GCR, local and regional decision-making is highly centralised within national-level government ministries with little recourse to effective local representation which is financially and executively limited. Participatory planning processes are scarce; already weak local councils were dissolved in 2011 and no other formal representative mechanism has taken their place (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH [GIZ], 2015). TADAMUN (2019) notes that funding for modest local development projects including street lighting, paving and environmental regeneration (one of the few budget items of the Ministry of Local Development for which data is available, and only a relatively small remit of the ministry) does not adequately reflect public need in its application across Cairene neighbourhoods. No insight on how money is allocated is publicly available, but it is likely that socio-political capital and bargaining power supersedes local conditions, as revealed by the organisation's 2015 study of 35 urban *'aqsām* in the GCR. The upscale *qism* of al-Nuzha has a population of 231,987, less than 2-percent of which are estimated to live below the national poverty line. However, it receives the highest allocation per capita for local development out of the districts surveyed at 42.1 EGP (2.47 USD). The *qism* that received the least allocation per capita was 'Ain Shams at 4.7 EGP (0.28 USD), next-door to al-Nuzha but with a larger population of 625,848, of whom 18-percent are statistically considered to be living in poverty. Notable too is Bulaq, where 50-percent of its 48,301 residents live beneath the poverty line and its local development allocation is only 7 EGP (0.41 USD) (TADAMUN, 2016; TADAMUN, 2019; City Population, 2018). Although this thesis does not focus on the micro-level of

inner-city Cairene urban development, outlining these local realities provides the context against which an investigation into governmental visions for a global Cairo is set. This helps revealing the priorities, challenges, and notions of societal development and political legitimacy that drive current government visions of the city's urban future.

3. Cairo as a Global City

Mike Davis (2006) describes a current epochal transition to the urban apocalyptic in terms of unprecedented and unprepared-for informal city growth, disconnected from processes of industrialisation and economic development. It is estimated that up to 70-percent of the global population will reside in city environments by 2050, with Global South developing countries almost exclusively to bear this phenomenon. Questions of urbanism and urban existence in these regions thus demand examination with regards to the lived experiences of a majority of the world's future inhabitants. As cities become larger, their functional and economic interdependence to national systems of organisation and intra-metropolitan relationships become more pronounced (GIZ, 2015), further demonstrating urban environments as a worthy subject of enquiry with relevance to global trends.

When considered in conjunction with processes of globalised neoliberalism on the city unit, this territorial dislocation is amplified. Saskia Sassen describes global cities as "the terrain where a multiplicity of globalisation processes assume concrete, localised forms" (2005, 40), emerging from the weakening of the national spatial unit under neoliberal forms of deregulation, and the fortification of global network economy logistics, financial circuits and supply chains. Certain cities thus take on new functionary significance as nodal points for financial centres, business services, multinational corporations and production sites

with concurrent tangible relevance to global socio-economic affairs and disconnection from more immediate national economic landscapes. Within a prevailing neoliberal discourse, this is manifest as the passage of national economies from “an economy of national planning, development, and social affirmation to an ‘open’ economy focusing on global investment, entrepreneurship, wealth concentration, informality, new industrialization, and speculation” (Vignal & Denis, 2006, 145). This is generally accompanied by socio-economic polarisation and its associated modes of inhabiting and consuming the city, symptomatic of unregulated market economy processes (Sassen, 2001).

Not all growing conurbations fit this model. Indeed, Davis estimates that three-quarters of the world’s future urban population growth will emerge in second-tier cities and minor metropolitan areas. However, Cairo deserves further examination with regards to Sassen’s paradigm. The Egyptian capital displays moderate to weak levels of integration into the global economy; relative to other Middle Eastern metropolises its gross urban product places it “well after the oil capitals of the Arab Gulf, but largely ahead of all the old metropolises of the not exclusively oil producing Arab countries” (Vignal & Denis, 2006, 105). Despite this comparative marginality, Cairo as a global, or globalising city to varying degrees is a well-established discourse (Singerman & Amar 2009, Vignal & Denis, 2006; Elsheshtawy, 2009; Ghannam 2002; De Koning, 2009; Roccu, 2013). Peterson describes the Egyptian capital as “a node in the rising transnational service economy, a strategic site for the acceleration of capital and information flows in North Africa and the Middle East... a multi-layered, polysemic place marked by the juxtaposition of different images of Egypt and the West, the local and the global, modernity and tradition, linked together by tourism, consumerism and enhanced mobility” (2011, 16). Commonly cited non-economic factors that enhance this claim include Cairo’s cultural centrality as a regional producer of film,

television, music and news; its location as the headquarters of the Arab League and several regional UN agencies; its role as interlocutor in conflicts in Palestine or Sudan; internationally prestigious centres of learning in al-Azhar and the American University in Cairo; and a world historical pedigree that places Cairo as a site of strategic importance from Pharaonic, Roman, Islamic, Ottoman, British and French colonial or Nasserite periods of rule. In particular, Cairo has been regarded as a collective locus of Arab consciousness and representation during modern history – the centre of Gamal Abd al-Nasser’s pan-Arab project and continued relative regional cultural and political, if not necessarily still economic, weight, as intimated by its familiar Arabic epithet *umm al-dunya*: the ‘mother of the world’. Cairo can thus be read as an urban space that has been profoundly shaped by its interactions and positioning according to the global.

D. A Genealogy of Politicised Urbanism: A Conversation with the Global Modern

“Caught in the vectors of particular histories, national aspirations, and flows of cultures, cities have always been the principal sites for launching world-conjuring projects” states Aihwa Ong (2012, 1). As the seat of administrative power capital cities often amplify this, holding critical demonstrative power as performative sites of ‘nationalist urbanism’ and potential global confluxes of influence (de Koning, 2009). Life in the capital comes to represent that of the wider nation, necessitating large investments in urban development to project a government’s visionary course and legitimacy as rulers, in turn shaped by global and regional currents and trends. Cairo’s modern cityscape stands as testament to successive leader’s attempts to physically impose a reimagining of the national, as informed by its place in the global, upon symbolic territory. This is expressed in much of the prominent literature on Cairo’s cityscape which acknowledges the city’s history of politicised urbanism in the modern period (Abu-Lughod, 1971; Ghannam, 2002; Selim,

2015; Elsheshtawy, 2013; Adham, 2004). The overview provided below is not exhaustive, but reflects arguably the three most significant periods of Cairene urban development relevant to this thesis under Khedive Isma'il Pasha, President Gamal Abd al-Nasser and President Anwar al-Sadat, given the respective administrations' articulation of an urban globality in their ideologically-driven visions for Cairo's built environment and successful implementation of plans.

Following moderate modifications under the reign of Ottoman Khedive Muhammad 'Ali Pasha, his successor Isma'il was the prime visionary of central Cairo's construction in the last half of the nineteenth century in the area considered as present-day *belle époque* Downtown. A self-professed Europhile, Isma'il planned to redevise the city as a 'Paris on the Nile' that would place Cairo as a worthy world power, inspired by an 1867 visit to Paris where he admired the reforms of Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann in the French capital. His return to Cairo marked rapid urban development in time for the 1869 opening of the Suez Canal and influx of foreign guests and visitors to the country. The new Isma'iliyya quarter towards the eastern Nile bank took the place of Cairo's older medieval centre further inland, enabled by dam construction which controlled river flooding. The land between Isma'iliyya Square to the south (present-day Tahrir), Bab al-Hadid Square to the north (present-day Ramsis), and 'Attaba Square to the east was developed according to modern, Europeanate styles: wide boulevards and grid-pattern streets, shopping arcades, villas and large apartment blocks, gas street lamps, an Italian opera house and French theatre, the central Birkat Azbakiyya gardens, and a renovated 'Abdin Palace. A display of urban order, geometric harmony and international architectural forms intimated Cairo and its ruler as a paradigm of modernity, culture and authority, standing in contrast to the perceived disarray and decay of medieval Cairo's organic urbanity (Abu-Lughod, 1971;

Selim, 2015). This reflected prevailing intellectual discourses of time around the interplay between Islam and the global modern, and Egypt's nascent nationalist movements; scholars such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad 'Abduh looked to principles of modernity inherent within Islamic theology, whilst others such as Rifa'a al-Tahtawi proposed that in order to be modern one must 'become European' (Elsheshtawy, 2013).

The era of Gamal Abd al-Nasser's rule from 1954 represents another urban metamorphosis in pursuit of the president's vision of a modern industrial nation built on an anti-imperialist assertion of Egyptian identity and social rights. Nasserite urban development prioritised city infrastructure, factories, manufacturing districts and planned neighbourhoods to accommodate workers in the nation's first state-subsidised housing projects. Cairo began to spread rapidly west and north, beyond the bulk of the older original settlement on the east bank. The new independent republic strived to move beyond its historical constraints and markers of colonial genuflection, expressed through modernist, functionalist and brutalist structures of stature: the Socialist Union Headquarters in Tahrir; the imposing concrete Nile Hilton built over the Kasr al-Nil British colonial barracks; or the Cairo Tower – according to popular narrative built with US funds intended to sway Nasser's support away from the Algerian anti-colonial struggle against the French, instead funnelled into the construction of Africa's tallest tower.² Designed by Egyptian-Lebanese architect Naoum Shebib, the tower's interior displays a mural of Egyptian and Syrian architectural monuments in celebration of Nasser's United Arab Republic; an expression of Arab resistance and pride, defiant of foreign interference in the newly sovereign nation (Selim, 2015; Elsheshtawy, 2013; Mousa, 2013).

² Upon completion of construction in 1961 Cairo Tower was the tallest construction in Africa at 187-metres, until it was surpassed by the Hillbrow Tower in Johannesburg, South Africa in 1971.

President Anwar al-Sadat further imposed his architecture of modernity on the Cairene cityscape. From the 1980s onwards new desert settlements have sprung up on the city's peripheries, characterised by high-end, enclavic spatial existence removed from the inferno of inner-city existence. *Infitāh* policies sought to recreate Egypt, in particular Cairo, as a more hospitable environment for foreign capital, investment and aid, politically orientated towards the US and its allies. Farha Ghannam writes that "The plan to build a modern Cairo placed great emphasis on the visual image of urban space. Aiming to imitate Western modernity, Sadat's policies privileged the gaze of tourists and upper-class Egyptians" (2002, 30-31). Luxury Western hotel chains and skyscrapers were constructed along the Nile Corniche; international chains, discos, malls and gated compounds became new features in the cityscape; and tourist-orientated development around Cairo's pharaonic and Islamic heritage was privileged as a growth sector. Infrastructural modifications were also carried out, enabled by World Bank expertise and funding, such as the construction of Cairo's underground metro network, improved reliability of Cairo's water and electricity grids, and extensive road networks, including the 72-kilometre Ring Road which encircles large parts of Greater Cairo. Slums areas that belied the capital's modern image were slated for clearance, with subsidised housing created for relocation in areas such as al-Zawiyya al-Hamra' and 'Ain Shams. However, the majority of residential development centred around new-build middle-class and high-end markets, or in informal areas, undertaken independently of government assistance (de Koning, 2009; Ghannam, 2002; Roccu, 2013). These urban trends largely continued into the Mubarak period, with declining social provision as Cairo's population continued to expand and urban conditions deteriorate, as this thesis will examine in more detail.

E. 2011: A New Mode of Urban Citizenship

"It is within the context of decades of the urbanization of injustice, we argue, the January 25th Revolution should be viewed."

- Omar Nagati & Beth Stryker, 2013, 617

Much has been made of the way in which the widespread protests witnessed during the 2011 Egyptian Revolution fundamentally changed the notion of what a public space is and can be in contemporary Cairo (Abaza, 2014; Nagati & Stryker, 2013; Kanna, 2012; Elshahed, 2014). During the eighteen days of public mobilisation, occupation of Tahrir Square and its contiguous neighbourhoods functioned as the geographic representation of protestors' collective claim for political change. Mona Abaza describes the occupation of the *mīdān* (town square) as an "entirely unprecedented novel choreography for the city" (2014, 163), almost defying classification in its dynamic evolution as "a barricade, a political rally, a rock and folk music festival, a religious revival and a collective, good humoured, satirical, deadly serious rebuke to all that the Mubarak regime represented" (Kanna, 2012, 364). The 'Independent Republic of Tahrir' functioned as a performative stage for resistance and solidarity, blurring the line between public and private space as occupiers ate, slept and protested outside (Butler, 2011). Mohamed Elshahed (2014) states that:

"The protests that began in 2011 showed how cities are stages for a struggle not only to shape urban space but also to create new forms of democratic representation. They shed light on how everyday spaces can become sites of resistance, revolution and transformation. This struggle is directly linked to the way power and capital have produced socially and economically unjust urban experiences."

The physical presence of citizens in the streets and squares of Egyptian cities in 2011 can thus be seen as an enactment of Henri Lefebvre's 1968 concept of *le droit à la ville* (the right to the city), arising from a specific set of urban, social and political conditions (Lefebvre, 1996). Although often broadly interpreted by activists, NGOs or local authorities as a citizen's claim to urban space and resources as part of a broader set of inclusive liberal-democratic civil rights Lefebvre's original concept is profoundly revolutionary (Purcell, 2014). The right to the city is the radical reassertion of inhabitant's right to exist in, use and manage urban spaces, beyond the forces of state authority and capitalism which have increasingly come to determine life in the modern city through the commodification of spatial authority. There is thus considerable scope to consider both the events of 2011 and the current conditions within Cairo through the Lefebvrian confluence of governmental, corporate and civil urban interests.

By highlighting Tahrir's powerful reclamation of urban public space, this is not to transform the *mīdān* into a synecdoche for the revolution's complex political, social and emotional processes and events that took place all over the country, or intimate a sudden Egyptian democratic awakening. Egypt possesses a long history and culture of civil society and labour movement protest and dissent. Considering only the contemporary period for the sake of brevity, the decade before January 25th saw an unprecedented rise in popular protest, despite Mubarak-era laws that placed trade unions under government control, banned street gatherings and sanctioned force against transgressors. This was the highest record of public demonstrations, sit-ins and strikes in Egypt since World War II. Following food subsidy cuts and rumours of a succession of power from the elder Mubarak to his son Gamal in the 2000s, new activist and political organisations were galvanised including

Kefaya ('Enough', Egyptian Movement for Change), April 6th Youth Movement and Mohamed El Baradei's National Association for Change. By 2010 Downtown Cairo was experiencing daily small-scale protests and workers strikes, particularly around the government buildings lining the street of Qasr al-'Aini which feeds into Tahrir (El-Hamalawy 2011; Ibrahim, 2014).

Whilst remaining cognisant of this history, the events in Tahrir can nevertheless be considered as of particular significance for the purposes of this thesis. Firstly, the January 25th achieved the immense feat of precipitating Hosni Mubarak's departure from office. Secondly, there is much evidence for the claim that in the revolution's aftermath, feelings of public empowerment and community galvanised new forms of organisation and social responsibility in Tahrir and beyond, specifically around issues of urban development and spatial ownership (Nagati & Stryker, 2013; Elazzazy & Zaazaa, 2017; Dana, 2013; Ahmed & El-Khatee, 2012; Ibrahim & Singerman, 2014). Nagati and Stryker (2013) described this as a 'new mode of urban citizenship' crystallising as Cairo's political and physical landscape changed through the dual ramifications of a disempowered state and an empowered people. This is particularly relevant given Egypt's limited space for formal civic engagement and social accountability prior to 2011. Changes encompassed both grassroots action and formal initiatives, such as the foundation of new NGOs, architectural consultancies, research hubs, pressure groups or publications around issues of urban belonging and citizen identity, including the Cairo Lab for Urban Studies; Training and Environmental Research (CLUSTER); Madd Platform; 10Tooba; Megawra; TADAMUN: The Cairo Urban Solidarity Initiative and Cairoobserver. They joined pre-existing urban justice organisations such as Takween or Shehayeb Consultant which were also galvanised by the post-revolutionary moment.

Post-2011 public demands for broader social justice are thus notable for their embracement of urban issues, including “demands for a more equitable distribution of public services, democratization of planning processes and local government and urban development policies which serve the general public, rather than wealthy residents, foreign investors, or real estate speculators” (Ibrahim & Singerman, 2014, 101). Mohamed Nada (2014, 153) describes “the rapid realization of citizens and traditionally non-vocal actors that they can collectively achieve substantial change from central or local government if they were able to aggressively lobby the Governors, or other senior governmental officials, through protests”. Ahmed and El-Khatee’s (2012) study examines the formation of neighbourhood protection alliances and street cleaning campaigns formed in the governmental and security vacuum following Mubarak's resignation. Ibrahim and Singerman (2014) note how some of these groups coalesced into effective forms of local collaborative representation. Examples include the *ligān sha’biyya* (popular committees) in Bulaq Abu al-‘Ala, Bulaq al-Dakrur and Mit ‘Uqba informal neighbourhoods that successfully lobbied and negotiated with Cairo and Giza governorates and other district authorities to gain better access to public services and leverage construction improvements. A phenomena of *ad hoc* highway ramp construction emerged from a number of informal settlements along the Ring Road, designed without exit and entrance ramps to the low-income neighbourhoods it cut through, effectively isolating residents from the rest of the city. Communities pooled resources to construct new access roads, free from governmental oversight (Dana, 2013; Nagati & Stryker, 2013). Street vendors began to occupy new areas to congregate, sell wares and in some cases, live. The post-2011 period can therefore be characterised as engendering a new awareness of urban rights and public life, with a particular visibility of the subaltern poor. It is this climate of heightened political and social

contestation over public areas of the Egyptian capital in the legacy of 2011 that forms the immediate and local context for this thesis and the current administration's search for global legitimacy.

II. Remaking the Old: Downtown Cairo

A. Chapter Introduction: Downtown Cairo in the Post-Revolution Moment

As outlined in the Introduction, the months following Mubarak's departure initiated a public reassertion of Downtown as a multi-functional social space, shaped by Lefebvrian notions of the right to the city that emerged from 2011's street protests and occupation. Mona Abaza describes the transformation of central Cairo and Tahrir in particular into a "24-hour living-cum-informal-commercial area" (2014, 168), marking an upswing in visibility of various urban populations such as informal street vendors, street children, families on outings or groups of teenagers socialising. This is not to overestimate a post-revolutionary urban utopia; the increased presence of street vendors and lack of police presence raised issues of increased congestions on pavements and roads, or crowds of young men loitering and harassing female passers-by. However, the phenomenon itself of new social-spatial behaviours asserting their belonging in the heart of the city is significant.

Relevant to this is the concurrent flourishing of cultural production in Downtown displaying a specific formulation of art as a participatory, public phenomenon (Shukrallah, 2015; El Shimi, 2015). A sudden lack of governmental oversight on social and financial restrictions engendered a lively independent arts scene. Existing projects were able to expand from previously limited closed spaces and new initiatives exploring non-hegemonic forms of expression found new find platforms, such as Zawya art-house cinema, 100Copies experimental record label and VENT alternative nightclub. Notably, artistic production was not confined to formal private areas: streets, squares, cafés and bars were transformed into makeshift performance spaces for film screenings, political talks, photography exhibitions or dance shows. The example of Al-Fann Midan ('Art is a Town Square') festival particularly stresses the link between participatory public artistry and the revolution. First held in April 2011 in Downtown's 'Abdin Square, Al-Fann Midan was described as "not just a cultural and artistic event that took place outside the framework of

official cultural institutions, but representing an exceptional revolutionary state that was the most expressive aspect of the revolutionary movement, to the extent that many consider the event the real gain and victory of the January 25th Revolution” (Shusha, 2016). The festival grew to regular monthly events held across multiple Egyptian governorates, hosting music and theatre performances, exhibitions, workshops and entertainment for children. It is significant for its youth and family engagement with new forms of socially participatory public life linked to usage of communal urban space.

1. New Military Urbanism

“This, then, is the new Downtown, the open-air museum for ghosts. The fruit of new capitalist cooperation, the security state and the development plans of the European Union. Yes, street vendors disappeared, as well as garbage and waste from the centre. But so did the people, youth and art; cafes closed and bars shut their doors. Life withdrew from the heart of Cairo: she that was said to never sleep.”

- Ahmad Nagi, 2016

Despite the post-revolutionary moment for a new mode of urban citizenship, this optimism appears to have passed. Downtown’s symbolic currency as the epicentre of the revolution is reflected in many of the urban changes that took place in the months and years following January 25th, 2011. The securitisation of central Cairo can be considered in relation to Stephen Graham’s (2012, 137) ‘new military urbanism’, defined as “the emerging constellation of military and security doctrine and practice which posits that key ‘security’ challenges of our age now centre on the everyday sites, spaces and circulations of cities”. This establishes the idea that potential violent threat may emanate from the everyday city and its inhabitants where urban security measures “normalise war and

preparations for war as central elements of the material, political-economic and cultural constitution of cities and urban life” (Ibid.). Judith Butler proposes that the political occupation of space not only asserts a “claim to the public, find[ing] and produc[ing] the public through seizing and reconfiguring the matter of material environments”, but at the same time “those material environments are part of the action, and they themselves act when they become the support for action” (Butler, 2011). Recognising this and neutralising public space as a tool and actor in the expression of anti-government sentiment is therefore paramount to the security state which wishes to avoid further civil confrontation.

Downtown’s changing built environment is illustrative of these ideas. Concrete buttresses now line government building in Qasr al-‘Aini, Muhammad Mahmud and Shaykh Riham Streets which surround Tahrir Square; names immortalised by the street battles and political graffiti of the post-revolution period. From November 2011 the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF)³ erected eight twelve-foot walls across major Downtown streets, paralysing free passage through the area until their removal in 2016. A wide iron gate guarded the Qasr al-‘Aini entrance to Tahrir to cut off access to the square if closed, later dismantled in 2018 (Trew et al., 2012; Flahive, 2017; Perry, 2014). All but two of the original eight entrances to the Sadat Metro station which serves Tahrir remain closed, canalising pedestrians into anticipated routes overseen by an enhanced police presence. Despite its central location and importance as only one of two stations that allow commuters to change lines, Sadat frequently shuts down around times of heightened political tension such as the anniversary of January 25th or the 2017 Tiran and

³ The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces governed Egypt in the interim period between the departure of Hosni Mubarak on February 11th, 2011 and the ascension of Muhammad Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party to governmental office on June 30th, 2012.

Sanafir protests (Egypt Independent, 2017). The embassies of the adjacent Garden City neighbourhood have expanded existing security measures to form a semi-militarised bunkered space of the affluent and expatriate, inviting quasi-Green Zone comparisons with Baghdad (Abaza, 2016). Installations such as blast protectors or check points have thus become commonplace in the heart of the city. As Ilyas Saliba (2015) notes, this is a familiar tactic of repressive regimes that have “credibly established the importance of security and stability as an effective counter narrative to the expression of grievances under authoritarian rule”.

2. Sisi’s War on Terror

Since Abd al-Fatah al-Sisi’s emergence onto Egypt’s political stage as the figurehead of the coup d’état that ended Muhammad Morsi’s short-lived Muslim Brotherhood government, his posture has been a hard-line stance on ‘providing security to the nation’ against a backdrop of increased terrorist and sectarian attacks across the country, particularly in the Sinai Peninsula. In July 2013 Sisi famously beseeched the Egyptian people in a televised speech to grant the military and security forces a mandate to combat violence and terrorism (Akhbar El Yom TV, 2013, 0.31), just one month before the Raba‘a al-‘Adawiyya and al-Nahda square massacres, described as “one of the world’s largest killings of demonstrators in a single day in recent history” (Human Rights Watch, 2014), where 900 Muslim Brotherhood supporters lost their lives to state security forces in the violent clearance of peaceful protestors’ encampments.

This speech marked the beginning of President’s Sisi’s ‘Egyptian War on Terror’, used to justify a wide range of activity in the name of security provision as counter-terror operations proliferated across the country, including the continuation of the aforementioned

securitisation of Tahrir. Without downplaying the very real threat from violent extremist movements—attacks against security personnel, religious minorities and foreigners are not unusual; in 2017 Islamist militants killed 311 civilians at the al-Rawda Sufi mosque in northern Sinai, making it the deadliest attack in Egyptian history—the anti-revolutionary dimension to these state operations are also apparent. Sisi’s ‘War on Terror’ (Sabry, 2018) appears to include his own citizens, their congregation and movement. Since 2014 there has been a well-documented sharp upswing in state-sponsored violence against civilians, including unlawful arrests, disappearances, mass trials and torture (Kandil, 2016b; Amnesty International, 2016). New legislation such as the 2015’s Law 94 on Anti-Terrorism (Official Gazette, 2015) broadened the scope of activities than can be prosecuted as against civil peace on an ill-defined basis that could be extrapolated to political protest or journalism. In November 2013 Act 107/2013: ‘For Organizing the Right to Peaceful Public Meetings, Processions and Protests’ (commonly known as the ‘Protest Law’) inhibited public mass gathering with strict punitive measures including the use of lethal force against demonstrators (Ahram Online, 2013). Using public spaces thus became increasingly problematised as visibility itself is rendered synonymic with dissent: in February 2018 President Sisi declared that “what happened seven or eight years ago [the 2011 Revolution] will not be repeated in Egypt again” (FRANCE 24 Arabic, 2018, 0.43). Downtown Cairo and by extension the rest of the city thus becomes a space of uncertainty and risk.

Indeed, since 2014 and the passing of the Protest Law public demonstration has waned dramatically. 2011’s defiant pro-democracy graffiti has been largely removed from the streets of Downtown and each revolution’s anniversary sees increasingly smaller demonstrations often met with lethal force from security personnel (Al Jazeera, 2018b;

BBC News, 2016). A prominent example is the viral images of activist Shayma al-Sabbagh in January 2014, shot dead in the back by a police officer whilst participating in a peaceful march in Tala‘at Harb Street to lay wreathes in commemoration of the 2011 protests (The Guardian, 2016). In recent years residential apartments around the square have been subject to police raids in the days preceding the anniversary of January 25th (Magid, 2016). Tahrir has not hosted any public protest in recent years, with clashes taking place in other cities or less-visible neighbourhoods of the capital. By January 25th, 2016, media reported that “the few demonstrations that occurred were so small, so short-lived and so far from the centre of the city that it’s nearly impossible to confirm they even happened” (Mada Masr & Esterman, 2016). Indeed, May 2018 protests against fare hikes for Metro tickets were limited to subway stations rather than public squares and swiftly shut down by security forces (Reuters, 2018).

3. *Al-Hamla al-‘Amniyya*: The Scourge of Street Vending

The summer of 2014 marked a significant government campaign to end informal commercial activity in the city centre which had proliferated following the revolution. Armoured vehicles, bulldozers and military police forcibly removed thousands of vendors around Tala‘at Harb, Qasr Al-Nil, Twenty-Sixth of July and Ramsis, arresting, fining and confiscating the wares and maintaining a security presence for several months to deter return. A limited number of vendors were relocated to the Turguman Garage complex, a relatively isolated, non-commercial area difficult to sustain a livelihood from which relies on heavy passing footfall (Tariq, 2014). Clearances resumed in 2018 with a number of Interior Ministry campaigns to further clear vendors from Downtown, with the busy ‘Attaba market square under particular contention. Alongside concerns of unlicensed trading and overcrowding, justification for police clearances was given as “an

intensification of the security presence in order to restore the cultural appearance of the streets and remove all occupations [of vendors] and violations from the street” (Omran, 2018). The government has since announced plans to build legally defined market areas for vendors and enact new legislation bringing informal commercial activity under state supervision (Al-Khalfawi, 2018; Sameer, 2018).

Clearances are variously described by state newspapers as a *ḥamla ‘amniyya* (‘security campaign’, Omran, 2018; Tariq, 2014) or a *ḥarb al-‘izāla* (‘war of removal’, Youm7, 2014). Alongside the heavy military presence, this draws a clear parallel between lower-class informal workers (and by extension Downtown as a space) as a security threat that demands violent treatment. A second paradigm of informal workers as an eyesore is also drawn upon – *al-ḥamla al-‘amniyya* is often characterised as a ‘cleaning up’ of Downtown. In the words of Cairo Governor Doctor Jalal Mustafa Sa‘id, the campaign represented a “return of the city centre to its natural state”, described as “a process to restore the civilised face of the centre of the capital, which has long been run down by the intensive presence of street vendors in Downtown” (Youm7, 2014).

The built environment thus becomes the medium through which a notion of ‘civility’ is abstracted. The city itself is privileged as the object of intervention for assistance (the return to its ‘natural state’), negating the rights of street vendors as inhabitants of the city, or even as possessing qualities of humanity in their perceived coarse, primitive existence. This goes beyond enforcing trading laws. The implication is that the lower classes are an unnatural incursion, rather than a product of Asef Bayat’s (2012) neoliberal city-inside-out which engenders a public visibility of the subaltern poor: in Cairo, 11.9-percent of the population are unemployed and thousands are pushed into illegal street hawking through

byzantine licensing and rental property laws (CIA World Factbook, 2017; Awatta, 2015). Governmental culpability for Downtown's urban degradation is thus absolved by hominifying blame and affliction – the street vendor as scourge, and the city as its victim.

4. Coffee Shops and Revolution

'*Ahwa* (coffee shop, pl. '*ahāwī*) culture is of particular relevance to the post-2011 period. A number of Downtown coffee shops were frequented by protestors during January 25th such as al-Bursa, a popular outdoor café known for its central location, 'street' authenticity and cosmopolitan crowd. Drawing on the history of political febrility in Downtown and Tahrir, this has served to somewhat mythologise the '*ahwa* in popular imagination as a forum for revolutionary youth exchange (Khairy 2016; Dana, 2012; Ryzova, 2015). The power of this association is reflected in the Sisi administration's disposition towards public social spaces. Since 2014 '*ahāwī*, cafés and restaurants have come under increasing state scrutiny with establishments targeted by police raids to arrest political activists. A prominent Interior Ministry campaign in early 2017 forced closure or in numerous cases, even demolition of properties using bulldozers or plain-clothed security forces equipped with sledgehammers (Al Araby, 2016; Al Sherbini, 2017).

As with the clearance of street vendors, legality and security are oft-cited pretexts for closure (Ahmad, 2017). '*Ahāwī* and restaurants are subject to licensing requirements to serve food, beverages or shisha, and thus many operate without permits as obtaining the correct paperwork can be extremely difficult. Similarly, the post-2011 political vacuum allowed illegal makeshift cafés to proliferate over the city, sometimes blocking streets and pavements. What differs from the street vendors case, however, is that whilst the vast majority of vendors work illegally, both licensed and unlicensed cafés have been

indiscriminately targeted during these crackdowns (Al Sherbini, 2017). This includes the traditionally lower-class, male-dominated pavement *'ahāwī baladīyya* ('local' coffee shops) such as al-Bursa, as well as established licensed cafés in middle-class neighbourhoods such as Nasr City, Heliopolis, Muhandisin and Zamalek known for a more affluent, mixed-gendered clientele (Magid, 2014; Egypt Today, 2017). Members of Parliament have also recently discussed the possibility of enforcing a mandatory midnight closing-time on *'ahāwī*: if enforced, this would significantly affect Cairo's notoriously nocturnal social scene (El Hekaya, 2018).

The relative affluence of many of these affected establishments and their clientele is notable. This cannot be cast as a beatification campaign for the city in the same way that clearing pavements of poor street vendors and plastic chairs is, and instead must draw on alternate logics, notably Sisi's quest to provide security for the nation. For example, the 2017 closures in affluent neighbourhoods were carried out after the death of a university graduate in a personal dispute at an upmarket café in Heliopolis; 'security concerns' were given as justification for further crackdowns (Al Sherbini, 2017). Or, a café in 'Abdin known to be patronised by supporters of the April 6th political group was closed on the grounds of that it allowed atheists and devil worshippers to meet there, rather than highlight the political dimension of its closure (Fouad, 2015). Thus to read *'ahwa* closures in tandem with street vendor clearances as a campaign against the 'undesirable poor' from an uncharitable ruling class is mistaken. Whilst an element of callous disregard for those that subsist off the formal economy is undoubtedly evident, a remarkable mistrust of social spaces themselves is also clear. The potentialities they hold for social connection translates only to dissent under the paranoid security regime. A governmental attack on communal space is therefore an attack on the legacy of 2011, manifest in socialised spatial dimensions.

5. Cultural Constriction

As with the closures of café establishments, since 2014 spaces of cultural performance and production have been subject to increasing governmental scrutiny which has radically altered the social and cultural life of the city. Revocation of licenses, raids, arrests of personnel and temporary and permanent enforced shutdowns have been carried out on both long-standing Downtown cultural establishments and those founded in the wake of the revolution. These include Townhouse Gallery and its sister organisation Rawabet Theatre, Studio Emad Eddin performance art centre, Dar Merit Publishing House, Al-Balad Bookstore, VENT nightclub and many more – venues and institutions associated with independent left-wing thought and educated Cairene youth (Magid, 2016; Naji, 2016; Mada Masr, 2017). Notably, in August 2014 the new government ceased issuing permits to the organisers of Al-Fann Midan to much public opposition, leading to the collapse of the festival. As of July 2014 a new law required all non-profit art organisations to register as formal NGOs which requires any funding to be first processed by the notoriously bureaucratic Ministry of Social Solidarity. This is reinforced by the October 2014 Penal Code amendments which makes receipt of foreign organisational funding punishable by life sentence or the death penalty if certain conditions are not met. Given the reliance of NGOs on international networks of patronage, this necessitates a complex renegotiation of business models if organisations wish to retain their legal status (Elkamel, 2018).

6. Museum for Ghosts?

Since its installation in 2014, the Sisi administration has demonstrated a sustained, deliberate and severe will to exert control over Downtown's demographics via the mechanism of spatial control. Its targets are both overtly political—protest and

occupation—and innocuous: cultural and artistic events, coffee shop culture. What links them together is their association, whether warranted or not, with any sort of public social activity that is not immediately known and controlled by the state. The possibilities of what this may include, therefore, are substantial. As Pesha Majid (2016) writing for *Mada Masr* states: “The raids in downtown Cairo are part of a wider campaign that not only targets people who are actively political, but also those who have the potential to be, and are therefore a threat”. This again resounds with Graham’s military urbanism that extends this risk to the built environment and those that frequent it. By invoking the potentiality rather than the fact, this permits repressive measures in the name of ‘security’, from legislation changes, the violent clearance of street vendors, ‘*ahwa* closures or raids on cultural spaces.

However, these attacks on some of Downtown’s spaces of circulation and recreation does not belie de-development per se. Rather, they are taking place in parallel with a government-approved programme of urban revitalisation which celebrates the area’s *belle époque* architecture as discussed below. This challenges a purely linear narrative of the flight of the wealthy from the centre to the desert – the reality is more uneven, envisaged as enclaves of gentrification and containment across the city. It also reveals a celebration and commodification of the institutions and places that define Downtown as a site of cultural and historic significance; paradoxically the same elements that have drawn governmental paranoia and reprisal in recent years.

B. Downtown Historic: Bohemia and the *Belle Époque*

The last part of the twentieth century saw international tourism take its place as the locomotive of Egyptian national growth. *Fanack* (2014) reported that in 2007 income generated by Egypt's tourist industry accounted for 20-percent of annual foreign currency

revenue (around 8 billion USD), trading on the monuments and structures of its ancient and medieval history in order to attract visitors to the country. Paul Amar (2013) describes how during the 1990s and 2000s areas in Islamic Cairo became “the nexus of new projects of heritage restoration, cultural moralisation, and population management” (102) through various urban development or restoration projects aimed at attracting international tourism whilst simultaneously producing new paradigms of human-securitisation. Modifications to the built environment were necessary in order to achieve this, prompting government initiatives to exhibit the city’s medieval religious quarters as consumable heritage for foreign markets through large internationally-funded projects. Examples include the government’s Historic Cairo Restoration Project, UNESCO’s Urban Regeneration for Historic Cairo and Aga Khan Trust for Culture al-Azhar Park and Darb al-Ahmar initiatives. The restoration of Cairo’s historical built environment has thus been pursued with renewed vigour by hegemonic agendas since the 1980s.

The *belle époque* buildings of Downtown Cairo, however, had previously been marginalised as a symbol of national heritage, despite its impressive architectural portfolio. Mohamed Elshahed writes that:

“Downtown was constructed over forty years by various landlords who purchased land or were given land by the Khedive if they promised to build “worthy” architectural pieces worth a minimum of 2000 Egyptian pounds. Worthy architecture of value at the time meant that it followed contemporary “European” architectural styles. These buildings would house residential units for upper classes of society both Egyptian and European.” (2009, 25)

These styles refer to a wide array of French and Italian renaissance architecture, neoclassical, Baroque, Arabesque, Bauhaus, rococo and art nouveau, dating from roughly 1870 to 1952. This is often conflated with a ‘colonial’ period and style, despite the reality that the British commissioned very little construction during the Protectorate period of 1882 to 1922, as a counterpoint to the physically exclusionary urban zoning practices of the *cordon sanitaire* typified by French colonialism in North and West Africa (Roy, 2004). Rather, much of the driving force behind real estate construction and speculation came from the private capital of monied Egyptian and foreign residents and businessmen which later diffused throughout the middle class. Non-Egyptians have been permitted to own land since 1850s Ottoman legislation reform and by 1910 foreign residents comprised around one-eighth of the city’s population of seven million. By 1920 non-Egyptians owned around 20-percent of Egypt’s land (Adham, 2004; El Kadi & Elkerdany, 2006). As well as the British and Ottoman colonial classes, many were considered *mutamaşşirūn* (‘The Egyptianised’); often Greek, Italian, French or Jewish communities that settled in Egypt from Napoleon’s Egyptian Campaign in 1801 and beyond (Abaza, 2001). The city itself can thus be read as a visual paradox; its growing cosmopolitan aesthetic a product of an inorganic colonial orientation in a globalising world.

Downtown Cairo too possesses a well-documented history as a centre of Egyptian intellectual and cultural public life with a specifically anti-institutional, progressive character (Ryzova, 2015; Abaza, 2001; Shukrallah, 2015). This can be attributed in part to its decline as an upper-class residential district from the 1970s onwards, lending Downtown a decaying bohemian glamour agreeable to its aficionados in which architectural charisma plays a part. A counter-culture of intellectual enquiry and the arts developed against the backdrop of modern Egypt’s febrile political history of revolution, *coup d’état*, war and

ideological contestations. As such, many of Downtown's social spaces came to represent “*de facto* cultural institutions” (Ryzova, 2015, 37) through performative congregation and discussion following public debates, seminars and exhibitions by generations of Cairene literati, artists and activists, or simply clientele meeting friends and trading in gossip. The ‘bohemian Downtown’ of the intelligentsia was thus constructed as a counter-narrative to hegemonic, state institutions, installing itself in the ‘*ahāwī*’ of al-Bustan and al-Bursa; bars of Hurriyya, Odeon, Gemaica, Lotus, Stella, Cap d’Or, Le Grillon and Windsor Hotel; cabarets of Scarabee Alley, Sherazade and Miami; restaurants of Estoril, Café Riche, and the Greek Club; and the galleries of Cairo Atelier and Mashrabia, to name but a few. From the late 1990s onwards, a small contemporary independent arts scene also flourished, notably around the now internationally famous Townhouse Gallery (established 1998) which provided a springboard for related artistic initiatives such as PhotoCairo (2002), Contemporary Image Collective (2004), Medrar for Contemporary Art (2005), and al-Nitaq Festival (2000-2001) (El Shimi, 2015).

1. Downtown in Decline

“The city of Cairo teaches us that its changing elites have often moved from decaying districts to new areas, leaving behind them run-down derelict spaces... Wist al-Balad [Downtown] has seen such rapid decay in recent decades that nothing can be worse than the bitter present. In other words, today’s centre looks like a slum. Façades and public spaces such as corridors, floors and steps have become visually chaotic with advertisements, cables, bursting air conditioners and so on.”

- Mona Abaza, 2011, 1081

Reasons for the exclusion of Downtown's *belle époque* architecture from national agendas of cultural preservation represent a confluence of political, ideological, legal, social and environmental factors that have allowed buildings fall in to disrepair during the last half of the twentieth century, both with and without intent. This must be viewed through the lens of politicised urbanism (Selim, 2015), and a history of modern Egypt as a contested space of occupation, revolution and external interference: from Khedival Ottoman monarchy, British colonialism, Israeli invasion and foreign claims over the Suez Canal. Its early and mid-twentieth century political class produced anti-colonial independence movements, strong-men nationalists, socialist pan-Arabism, political Islam and Third World solidarity movements. It is thus unsurprising that prevailing intellectual tendencies have been deeply critical of anything construed as symbolic of colonial culture (Abaza, 2011), even if this is reductive and flawed in its reading of Downtown's history, as Elshahed points out. With regards to Downtown, this has meant that *belle époque* era architecture came to be ideologised as mutually exclusive to a national heritage and identity.

During the 1940s and 1950s buildings associated with the foreign occupation increasingly fell victim to vandalism and petty arson, culminating in the Cairo Fire of January 16th, 1952. Egyptians protesting the killing of 50 policemen by British troops in Isma'iliyya burnt and looted some 750 properties across Downtown, targeting those belonging to or frequented by the British, the Royal Family or other Westerners and aristocracy, such as nightclubs, the old Opera House and Shepherd's Hotel. Nasser's decolonisation and nationalist policies in the early republican era forcibly expelled or encouraged the migration of large numbers of the *mutamaşşirūn* and Egyptian bourgeoisie from Egypt, particularly following the British, French and Israeli invasion during the 1956

Suez Crisis and the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. Their land, properties and possessions were confiscated or forcibly ‘donated’ to the state. Urban development policies purposely passed over Downtown's *belle époque* palaces and villas as unworthy of maintenance due to this association with a privileged aristocratic class. Many buildings were repurposed as public-use institutions that gradually fell into disrepair. The Palace of Sa‘id Halim Pasha (grandson of Khedive Muhammad ‘Ali Pasha), later the al-Nasriyya School for Boys, now standing gated and derelict on Champollion Street is one example. Streets and neighbourhoods were renamed to reflect a nationalist identity, with Isma‘iliyya Square becoming today’s Tahrir (‘Liberation’) (Al Kadi & Elkerdeny, 2009; Selim, 2015).

Antiquated rental laws have further discouraged landlords from renovating property. Housing legislation to protect low-income citizens first issued under Nasser kept apartment rates artificially low through rent-controlled contracts able to be inherited by first-degree family members after the death of the lease-holder. Measures making tenant eviction difficult, even after contracts expire, were also put in place. This was also part of a wider process of decolonisation through dismantlement of private property rights associated with the former aristocratic classes (El-Kazaz, 2018). Landlords collecting as little as 10 EGP (0.56 USD) per month for decades have been unable or unwilling to pay for building improvements, nor tenants to pay independently for critical renovations. It is not uncommon for affluent families that own property in the area to continue paying miniscule amounts of rent to leave apartments empty and live in second homes in the upscale neighbourhoods of Zamalek, Nasr City and Sixth of October. Homeowners also may prefer to leave apartments empty rather than risk renting to tenants who may later refuse to leave. Despite a new law in 1996 (Law 4/1996, also known as the ‘New Rent’ Law) prohibiting mandatory imposition of rent control on contracts issued after this date, Old Rent still

applies to over one and a half million households in Cairo. This two-tiered system further disinclines landlords from refurbishment in attempts to force families to leave decrepit accommodation, thus breaking Old Rent agreements and allowing new, uncontrolled contracts to be issued that are adjusted for profit. Settling property disputes is difficult through Egypt's Kafkaesque judicial system, further hindering constructive tenant-landlord relations and building maintenance (Khalil, 2018; Fayed, 2009).

Furthermore, heavy pollution and poor infrastructure has contributed heavily to the degradation of urban fabric. This is by no means unique to Downtown, but as a central transit hub at the confluence of several major transport arteries it suffers more than the city's outlying areas. Scientists researching noise pollution in Cairo found that in the public squares of Tahrir and Ramsis "noise often reaches 95 decibels... which is only slightly quieter than standing next to a jackhammer" (Slackman, 2008). As a result of these combined factors, many of the higher-end functions of the central business and leisure district have migrated elsewhere in the city, further exacerbating the deterioration of Downtown as the erstwhile locus of high society.

Unsurprisingly, the Downtown of today is therefore not a popular residential area; most business owners live elsewhere, as well as the patrons that frequent their shops, cafés and bars. Those that do are largely "ageing residents, remnants of the neighbourhood's heydays, intellectuals and artists, foreigners who stay temporarily, and downward mobility inhabitants whose inability to move out represents social and economic failure" (El Gibaly, 2015). Urban development thus "becomes an idiom through which to talk about the moral characters of the people who live there" (Peterson, 2011, 17), imbuing the choice of where to make one's home, attend school, spend leisure time or shop for groceries with

existential quandary. The link between Tahrir and the violence of the post-2011 period (the continuation of protests and SCAF's subsequent securitisation of the area) adds insecurity and criminality to this list. As such, many middle and upper-class Egyptians choose not to frequent the area, despite its cultural pedigree and central location. In recent decades the area has at best retained a certain bohemian decaying glamour; at worst, a squalid, dangerous poverty.

C. The Heritisation of Khedival Cairo

The destruction wrought by the October 1992 Cairo earthquake highlighted the vulnerability of the capital's built environment. 545 people lost their lives, 50,000 were made homeless, 9,350 buildings were destroyed or severely damaged and over 200 historic monuments affected, including a large block falling from the Great Pyramid of Giza and the collapse of one of al-Azhar Mosque's minarets (National Centres for Environmental Information, n.d.). This prompted a wide consensus on the need for efficient urban reconstruction. Whilst ancient and medieval monuments and structures were restored, many of the partially destroyed *belle époque* structures were slated for demolition by government agencies. New interest around a hitherto neglected category of Egyptian architectural heritage was provoked, galvanising a nascent movement for Downton's protection across a diverse range of actors (Abaza, 2011). Local community groups, university research centres, urban planning consultants, certain state officials, businessmen and entrepreneurs coalesced into preservation movements that invested political and financial capital into restoration, successfully preventing the demolition of many structures. Campaigns received widespread media attention from both state and opposition press, with new patrons such as First Lady Suzanne Mubarak increasing the visibility of the cause (El Kadi & Elkerdeny, 2006; Singerman & Amar, 2006).

In order for these social coalitions to emerge, a fundamental shift around how the built environment was perceived and related to was necessary. Dominant trends in state-led architectural and urban development and preservation had previously sanctioned only the Pharaonic, Coptic and Islamic as ‘authentic’ expressions of Egyptian history. Also challenging is Downtown’s extant function as a space of social and economic activity, contradicting bureaucratic practices prepared only for historic monuments that are “typically taken out of everyday life, fenced off and often put on tourist itineraries” (Elshahed, 2015, 127). Galila El Kadi and Dalia Elkerdany consider the new promotion of Khedival antiquity as arising from a process of ‘heritisation’ – the rendering of something as a repository of national patrimony and meaning where none previously existed. They describe heritisation in the following words:

“A process geared to converting exchange value into cultural value by enhancing objects and sites with new functions so that they might serve as a means to transmit knowledge and construct culture and identities; as places where people (or certain classes of people) can spend their leisure time and contemplate aesthetic beauty; as driving forces for local and regional development that draw in tourists, stimulate consumption, and generate income and profit on national and global scales.” (2006, 350)

This definition understands ‘heritage’ as ‘inherited property’; something received and assessed by each generation as to its worth, how it should be used and perceived. This act of assessment is cultural, in that it creates and defines a relatable collective past and identity through management of symbolic markers. It is also economic, in that it engenders a value

judgement realised in financial terms through use, exchange and ownership claims of such heritage. As such, heritisation of the built environment acts as a process of social sorting. This takes place at the macro, national level of identity formation—building a narrative of Egyptian history—but also the micro, everyday level of spatial usage – who is this heritage for? Who is entitled to access and enjoy it? Thus heritisation seeks to be hegemonic in its determination of claims to space and identity, as delineated by class and capital. In doing so this denies the coexistence of multiple heritages to which a range of social identities relate, thus proving inherently self-contradictory of its claims to a universal national history.

Heritisation must also be seen within the wider narrative of Middle Eastern cities in moments of neoliberalism and dominant Western discourse. As Yasser Elsheshtawy (2004) notes, many of the region’s major cities are perceived to live in the shadow of aesthetic narratives of exalted Islamic pasts and cosmopolitan nineteenth-century colonial refinement, juxtaposed to the despotic present of poverty, dictatorship, terrorism or war. Cairo of course, is no exception. The ‘Arab city’s narrative’ is therefore one of loss and decline since the twelfth-century heyday of Islamic enlightenment, with a brief reorientation to the modern under European colonialism. Hegemonic intellectual and development trends from the 1980s onwards entrenched these perspectives by promoting urban restoration as tied to civilisational cultural or religious roots; as if the city were divorced from any other surrounding reality or history. This arises from the hegemonic perspective that Middle Eastern cities are somehow disconnected from the rest of the ‘developed’ world. The only form of identity that makes sense is thus capitalisation on historic former glory.

1. Nostalgia as Utopia

"There are many Cairenes as well as foreigners who look back to some perceived golden period, usually through a blinkered memory conditioned by revulsion at what Cairo has since become."

- David Sims, 2011, 14

If heritisation is the vehicle through which a built environment is transformed into markers of national identity and spatial ownership, then nostalgia is the specific idiom through which Downtown Cairo's heritisation has been expressed. Understanding the origins of nostalgia and its iteration around Downtown's *belle époque* urban form can further understandings of the specific political, economic and cultural milieu of contemporary Egypt.

A new flurry of academic and cultural production around the notion of a 'disappeared Cairo' can be noted from the 1990s onwards. It speaks to lost glories temporally located in a perceived 'Golden Age' of pre-independence Egypt and spatially captured in Downtown's colonial buildings and squares. Alongside the nascent architectural preservation movements themselves and the renewed interest in Downtown as a space of leisure and the arts, this disposition is reflected in a proliferation of history books, academic papers, novels, documentaries, exhibitions, coffee table books and films borrowing from this milieu (Elsaket, 2015; El Kadi & Ekerdany, 2006; Abaza 2011). Ifdal Elsaket (2015) notes how popular television serials and films reversed the role of pashas and princes as corrupt, cruel stock-villains, shifting to romanticised readings of palace intrigue and celebratory depictions of high living. Arguably one of the most successful modern Egyptian novels ever published, Ala'a al-Aswani's 2002 international bestseller *The Yacoubian Building* (later a film and television series of the same name) explores

Downtown's seedy bohemia through its landmarks, playing on the faded grandeur of a bygone age. In Cairo today, barely two weeks go by without an advertisement for an art exhibition, city tour or photography workshop themed around Downtown's *belle époque* heritage. The popular @DowntownCairo social media account (a collaboration between Al Ismaelia real estate company and Cairo-based MO4 Network media agency) creates content around some of these events and themes, with over 128,000 followers on Facebook (MO4, n.d.).

How can the fascination with the *belle époque* be explained? This was the birth of Egypt as a nation, entering the world stage during the globalising nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a regional political and economic heavyweight. Egyptian agency drew strength from its cosmopolitanism, rediscovering “proud histories of multiple, intersectional globalisms, such as their appreciation for a Mediterranean or pharaonic, or even Hellenistic identity” (Singerman & Amar, 2006, 31). The domestic intellectual classes experimented with modernist, secular and literary ways to organise and comment on public life, represented in figures such as Muhammad ‘Abduh, Qasim Amin, Sa‘ad Zaghlul and Ahmad Shawqi, or movements such as the liberal nationalist Wafd Party and the al-Nahda cultural renaissance. Cairo’s city centre represented a nation moving forwards; Khedive Isma‘il’s ‘Paris on the Nile’ as a thoroughly modern global capital. Popular Egyptian online lifestyle magazine *Cairo Scene* praised the @DowntownCairo Instagram account for its depiction of “the admirable past when Egyptians were actively more liberal, cultured and decent with one another” (Mansour, 2015). The Downtown that emerges is thus one of tolerant cosmopolitanism and Arab creativity, embodied in a cityscape that boasts an international genealogy, modern infrastructure and aesthetic eye.

Whilst there is much to celebrate in this history, contemporary cultural and intellectual production has selectively essentialised this celebratory narrative over that of violent colonial subjugation, classist elitism and monarchical stagnation. The criticism that the new liberal political and cultural institutions of this era could also be “limited, elite oriented, and colonially constrained” (Denis, 2006, 54) is unimportant, as is acknowledgment of Downtown as the locale of colonial cadres, foreign aristocracy, expatriates and elite Egyptians. The irony is left unaddressed that the exclusivity of the modern city centre produced the spatial and social inequalities behind two revolutions and a military coup (1919 and 1952), as well as the 1952 Cairo Fire where Downtown’s colonial buildings were purposely destroyed.

2. The Golden Age, Revisited

What can explain this disconnect from reality and an apparent resurgence in affinity for colonial gentility? Amongst critics of *belle époque* nostalgia there is consensus that glorification of the past is as much about criticism of the present as it is retrograde sentimentality (Sims, 2011; Denis, 2006; Abaza, 2011 & 2018; Elsaket, 2015; Elshahed, 2007; El Kadi & Elkerdany, 2006). Nostalgia is thus a “narrative of loss” (Roy, 2004, 65); a reminder of current hardships and societal decline, considered to be worse than whatever has gone before. Aesthetically and environmentally this is clear – contemporary Cairo as the “epitome of savage urbanism” (Sims, 2011, 15) meta-narrative is hard to deny as a face-value descriptor. However, Elsheshtawy’s (2004) reading of heritage movements as a product of underdevelopment and hegemonic Western neoliberal discourse (Middle Eastern cities in a state of paralysis and inability to self-help without recourse to the past) unpacks the social and political contexts to which nostalgia belongs. It is not just heritisation which is deemed necessary, but the specific way this is articulated and

achieved. From the 1980s onwards this has been neoliberal economic deregulation as overseen by the IMF, World Bank and associated Western governments and developmental institutions.

Nostalgia and heritage movements should thus be considered as an alternative reading of how today's Global South cities are experiencing (and not coping with) the ramifications of global free-market experiments. In Egypt and other Middle Eastern nations, *infītāḥ* policies and their contemporary iterations have had dramatic effects in urban contexts. As Najib B. Hourani and Ahmed Kanna state:

“As the recent Arab uprisings against poverty and the bureaucratic predation make clear, it is the everyday citizens of Arab cities who have suffered the bitterness that neo-liberalism sows: perpetual underemployment, increased poverty, population displacement, authoritarian control, and political-economies dominated by local, regional and indeed, global finance, insurance, and real estate interests.” (2014, 601)

In the Egyptian context this is only enhanced by post-2011 political ossification and economic crisis as Sisi's premiership is viewed as a 'return to Mubarak-era politics, but worse'. Nostalgia can be seen as the “logical consequence of the dreams of utopias instigated by the revolutionary momentum” (Abaza, 2018, 182) which have since been repressed by the trauma of Sisi's brutal administration and grinding economic hardships following the devaluation of the Egyptian Pound in 2016 at the behest of the World Bank. This malaise of revolutionary fatigue is described as thus:

“A collective feeling of hopelessness, because the possibility of dreaming for a better future is discouraged by an increasingly difficult daily life, clear evidence that positive change will not materialize in the near future... It seems certain that the 2011 Tahrir collective experience will not be repeatable. If it were, the human cost would be extremely high. People understand that any future insurrection will be harshly suppressed.” (Abaza, 2017, 172 & 174)

The future as well as the present thus holds no possibility for a better life that pro-democracy and social justice movements have been seeking. Nostalgia is therefore not only loss, but also defeat. It is generated from the unbearable present, resulting in an idealisation of the past, despite what may have actually taken place. Whether or not the pre-1952 boulevards of Downtown were accessible to the majority of Cairenes, whether they were clean and unencumbered by street vendors, whether unveiled women did walk down them without harassment, or even whether imperial subjugation was dehumanising is all beside the point. What matters is not truth and facts, but what values and idealisations are selectively drawn from these depictions. Nostalgia is a tool to make sense of one's desires; to construct both past and future utopias, reflecting which aspects of Egyptian society its proponents would like to see realised. Nostalgia is therefore what Anaya Roy calls a post-modern phenomenon in that it is “a look back to the future” (2004, 65), attempting to recover a better time to come from a discriminatory reading of the past.

Thus nostalgia is not a rewriting of history *per se*. It simply smooths and flattens memory through selective representation and production. It fails to recognise both the realities it omits, and the reasons why these notions of refined elegance and liberal enlightenment may have originally come about. Indeed, Elsaket notes that many of the

images—photographs, films, magazines—that portray Cairo’s ‘Golden Age’ are advertisements for products that emerge from a specific commercial context, or media content that reflects a certain visual culture: concerts at the oldest opera house in Africa, Vespa commercials where beautiful women ride scooters through Downtown, British officers drinking cocktails at the Shepherd’s Hotel. In other words: Egypt as a modern, liberal, cultured nation. Contemporary heritisation as an expression of neoliberal normativity thus renders the complex sets of capitalist meaning embedded within these images as flat reality through reproduction of visual style for modern audiences. In doing so this “intersect[s] with contemporary neoliberal logic and its values that glorify economic prosperity, production, elite consumption values, and especially a neo-liberal view of the city – the glitz and glamour of downtown Cairo, as a site of capitalist production and consumption, industry, depopulation, gentrification, and elite shopping tastes” (Elsaket, 2015). The autocratic power of the erstwhile colonial class and opulent private wealth of the aristocracy has ceased to be distasteful to contemporary capitalism as it once was when post-colonial socialist nationalism prevailed, even as food subsidy removals and price hikes leave society’s most vulnerable unable to survive.

Thus again, nostalgia and heritage movements should be considered as an alternative reading of how today’s Global South cities are experiencing late-stage capitalism. There is merit in unpacking why colonial nostalgia and heritisation emerged during the 1980s and has continued to flourish in Sisi’s neoliberal security state. As Eric Denis states: “this parallel [between the pre-1952 era and the present] does not just romanticize the spirit of neoliberal free enterprise or certain elite aesthetic values and lifestyles, it *also reconfigures modes of production*” (2006, 58, own emphasis added). Both eras offer models for capital accumulation through urban development marked by real estate excess and speculation,

dominated by elite private stakeholders who market aspirational living. The state as a vehicle for humane development is negated through its association with unrefined style and disregard for heritage in Downtown's degraded urban fabric. Neoliberalism's normative reality asserts that no other idiom for development, growth and living can be imagined. Nostalgia as not only loss but also defeat once again is asserted – an inability to outthink capitalist logics in a post-ideological moment (Soborski, 2013).

Why is this relevant and what does it mean? It is clear that a revival and restoration of the *belle époque* is more than a question of cyclical taste and style; it is the ability to obfuscate and redefine reality. Nostalgia stakes an ideological claim to territory which heritisation legitimates through its physical imposition on the city. Beautification of the built environment “render[s] invisible the brutal mechanics of capitalist valuation” (Roy, 2004, 65) by foregrounding aesthetic style and the politics of heritage preservation over the needs of residents. This has essentialised colonial oppression to a sanitised, depoliticised aesthetic, condemning Cairo as one of Elsheshtawy's ‘Arab cities as part of a narrative of loss and decline’ – underdeveloped and chaotic due to their own inability to organically progress without neoliberal restructuring. Nothing is beyond its reach, even in law: in 1991 Hosni Mubarak quietly lifted the exile imposed on the erstwhile King Fu'ad II and in 1999 allowed descendants of Khedive Muhammad ‘Ali Pasha to claim their ancestor's private possessions (Elsaket, 2015). In the years preceding 2011, Mubarak began to position his eldest son, Gamal, to inherit his presidency, introducing a kind of quasi-monarchical, familial successorship which found both opposition and significant support amongst the public (Denis, 2006).

Urban development in the name of heritisation and beatification is now obfuscating the violent removal of street vendors, slum clearances, population displacement and gentrification that prices out current residents. And more importantly in the post-2011 period, it is also neutering Egypt's history of progressive resistance and movements for socially inclusive politics. The message presented by government agencies and their private business partners is clear: the last sixty years of Egyptian history contain nothing worthy of celebration. Tahrir's most recent significance demands erasure. Nostalgic heritisation through urban development is thus a new method of spatial occupation, transcending sit-ins and protest, or even police cordons and roadblocks in its ability to permanently transform both the physical environment and mental memory and perception. Through heritisation, commemoration of Downtown as a centre for social resistance is relegated to the 'Café Riche' model; a famous restaurant dating back to 1908. Café Riche is known as the former haunt of famous Cairene intelligentsia, including the activists of 1919's revolution and the Free Officers movement of 1952's, which now capitalises on its history as an overpriced, generic tourist spot near Tahrir Square (The Economist, 2011). Less than five-minutes' walk away its 2011 equivalent—the *'ahāwī* of al-Bursa for example—are long gone. Café Richism is thus the only permissible form of revolutionary spirit – one which conforms to a culturally commodifiable, distant history.

D. Inscribing Heritage into Law

Downtown and its Khedival-colonial architecture as a new area of focus is reflected in legislative changes from the 1990s onwards. These attempts at preservation laws can be broadly characterised as lacking in transparency, unevenly applied and divorced from any wider municipal operational vision as the deterioration of culturally significant buildings continued, but nevertheless significant for their nascent successes and renewal of interest

in Downtown's architectural patrimony. Legal protection is a vital part of the heritisation process, assessing, sorting and enshrining attitudes and behaviours towards the built environment and its intended users within a national legal framework. This provides a way to validate or negate claims to and narratives of the space that is hegemonic in its determinism. Exploring some of the new partnerships and coalitions between state and private enterprise that have coalesced around the urban preservation and development movement in Downtown also helps further elucidate the processes of nostalgic heritisation described above.

During the 1990s various government agencies and associated consulting firms attempted to compile registries of notable buildings for the first time; a practice previously reserved only for ancient monuments. Although rudimentary in form, the two most successful (from the General Organisation for Physical Planning [GOPP]⁴ in 1997 and the Ministry of Housing and Infrastructure's Committee for the Safeguarding of Architectural Heritage in 1998) succeeded in establishing initial frameworks for documentation and future assessment. Legislation prohibiting the destruction or alteration of buildings related to Egypt's modern history was also passed. Expanding what could be counted as such was formalised by Law 144/2006 "On the Regulation of the Demolition of Unthreatened Buildings and Constructions and the Conservation of the Architectural Heritage" which aims to safeguard "buildings and structures of outstanding architectural style that are associated with the national history or a historic personality, [or] that represent a historic

⁴ The General Organisation for Physical Planning (GOPP, *al-hayy'a al- 'āma lil-takhḍīṭ al- 'umrānī*) was established in 1973 within the Ministry of Housing, tasked with the formulation of urban policy and preparation, coordination and implementation of development planning. It replaces the Greater Cairo Planning Commission created in 1965. Since 2015 the GOPP now falls under the rubric of the Ministry of Housing, Utilities and Urban Communities.

era or that are considered a tourist attraction” (Law 144/2006, 2006, Article 2). This represented a new delineation between ‘historic’ and ‘heritage’ – up until this point, the only comparable legislation was Law 117/1983 “On the Protection of Antiquities” which considered only buildings and movable objects dated prior to 1883 as worthy of preservation (El Kadi & Elkerdany, 2006; Fouad, 2014, Awatta, 2015).

In 2001 a new governmental body was founded by the Ministry of Culture under Presidential Decree 37/2001 that oversaw the designation of Khedival Cairo as a protected heritage area. The National Organisation for Urban Harmony (NOUH, *al-jihāz al-qawmī lil-tansīq al-ḥaḍārī*) now acts as a main partner in all state development attempts in Downtown, with a mandate to “realise the aesthetic value of the external forms of buildings, architectural and archaeological spaces, and the foundations of the urban fabric of cities, villages and all urban areas of the state” (National Organisation for Urban Harmony, n.d.). This again represents a significant step in the redefinition of history and heritage, given that its counterpart for Islamic architectural preservation, the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA, also part of the Ministry of Culture), has existed in some form since Khedive Tawfiq Pasha founded the Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l’Art Arabe in 1881 (Ibrahim, 2009).

During the 2000s NOUH, Cairo Governorate and GOPP launched a small number of projects to beatify areas of Downtown. These were carried out with the financial and organisational support from non-state actors, including transnational development agencies, NGOs, diplomatic missions, conservation societies, and foreign and domestic private sector entities. In 1999 the area of al-Bursa around al-Alfi and Sharifayn Streets was pedestrianised and a number of façades restored on notable old buildings such as the

Stock Exchange, Central Bank and Cosmopolitan Hotel. Similar refurbishments were later undertaken in ‘Imad al-Din Street and structures around Tahrir, Ramsis and Tal‘at Harb squares (El Kadi & Elkerdany, 2006). Many of the buildings selected are state-owned, falling under the umbrella of Misr Real Estate Assets (MREA) established in 2007 as a subsidiary of the publicly-owned Misr Insurance Holding Company (MIHC). MREA manages its parent entity’s real estate portfolios and investments which include 140 Downtown properties (Rabie, 2015). However, such regenerative initiatives have been noted for their lack of community participation in planning processes and limited impact, mainly confining projects to superficial external refurbishment such as cleaning and painting, rather than structural renovation or social initiatives (Attia et al., 2017; Elshahed, 2015). NOUH also sponsored several international competitions for the redevelopment of ‘Attaba and Ramsis squares, none of which progressed to the implementation stage due to weak operational organisation on the part of the Egyptian government (Moursi, 2011; Awatta, 2015).

1. Foundations for Downtown’s Future

Two events took place in 2008 that are currently exerting great impact on present-day Downtown and its future. The first is the Mubarak government’s announcement of the city-wide Cairo 2050 urban development vision, explored in more detail in Chapter Two. Amongst other things, the plan reimagined the city’s architectural heritages as ‘open-air museums’, including *belle époque* Downtown, the medieval Islamic city’s mosques and bazaars, and a new tourist complex adjacent to the Pyramids promoting the relics of Ancient Egypt. In Downtown, Cairo 2050 proposed an overhaul of Tahrir, ‘Abdin, ‘Attaba and Ramsis squares, including clearance of informal structures, installation of green and pedestrianised spaces, construction of multi-story garages to offset parking congestion, and

the rerouting the Sixth of October overpass in the latter. It also designated the Nile-side Maspero neighbourhood on the north-west edge of Downtown as a new Central Business District (General Organisation for Physical Planning [GOPP], 2008). Cairo 2050 no longer exists as a name, but its projects and planning logics remain largely unchanged under the Sisi government, funded by a range of Egyptian and foreign state and private sector entities. Its aim is to assert Cairo's presence as a global city; the championing of its cultural heritage is a central component to this.

The second event is the foundation of the Al Ismaelia for Real Estate Investment company in the same year. Al Ismaelia is a private Egyptian-Saudi Arabian firm that began purchasing real estate of architectural and historical significance in the Downtown area, often in poor condition, with the aim of renovation for upscale usage. It was named as a key collaborator in Mubarak's Cairo 2050 (Berger, 2014), a position it retains under the Sisi government's vision for central Cairo's redevelopment.

The revolution of 2011 interrupted the appetite and capacity for large-scale urban development. Cairo 2050 and the plans of Al Ismaelia were put on hold whilst the country weathered political uncertainty and successions of regime change. With a return to relative governmental stability under Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi, the urban development of Downtown has moved to the political foreground in a manner not seen in previous decades. The next sections will consider some of the changes that central Cairo is currently undergoing due to the influence of Al Ismaelia and contemporary state-led urban planning within the context of Downtown's heritisation movement. Both represent new forms of social, cultural, political and economic confluences emerging around redevelopment in Downtown Cairo and further afield. Examining these trends and relationships helps understand the

change in governmental and legislative orientations towards Downtown's built environment.

E. Al Ismaelia for Real Estate Investment

"Ana wust el-balad" ("I am Downtown")

- Al Ismaelia for Real Estate Investment, marketing slogan used in 2015

Al Ismaelia for Real Estate Investment is not the only private heritage developer operating in Downtown Cairo; other notable examples include Sigma Properties (which has refurbished buildings on Tal'at Harb and 'Imad al-Din Streets, and a larger portfolio in Alexandria) and Alchemy Design (currently renovating the iconic Tal'at Harb Square branch of Groppi café). However, it is by far the largest—possessing twenty-three *belle époque* buildings of historical importance as of August 2018—and most influential in terms of its capacity for social transformation, thus justifying the company as a subject of investigation. Al Ismaelia plans to acquire five to eight more properties over the next three years, including the development and launch of nine integrated projects, with the final aim of owning around 15-percent of Downtown's total buildings. This has been part of all successive government's wider development plans for the city since 2008, including the current administration's ongoing urban reforms (Saleh, 2018; Berger, 2014). The government's partnership with Al Ismaelia and the company's current position as the prime driver of heritisation of Downtown represents the failure and limitations of state-led initiatives to revitalise the area in the 1990s and 2000s (Elshahed, 2015). Examining their business model also further highlights the neoliberal restructuring of the city centre through processes of nostalgic heritisation, gentrification and securitisation.

Al Ismaelia was co-founded in 2008 by two private equity firms; BPE Partners (formerly Beltone Private Equity) of Egypt and Amwal Al Khaleej of Saudi Arabia. Overall, two-thirds of Al Ismaelia's investment capital originates from Saudi Arabian investors, including notable businessmen Sherif Suleiman and Sheikh Sulayman Abbanamay. One of BPE's board members is Ammar al-Khudairy, founder of Amwal Al Khaleej. One of BPE's financial directors is billionaire tycoon Samih Sawiris, Al Ismaelia's majority shareholder at 35-percent. The Sawirises are Egypt's wealthiest family, drawing their fortune from construction and telecommunications including mobile phone networks in North Korea and Iraq, and as founding members of the Orascom holding group. The family also have significant involvement in Cairo 2050 and ties to the Egyptian political classes. SCA recently granted Orascom a high-profile contract to take over previously state-run management and administration of the Giza Pyramid tourist complex (Al Hayat, 2018). Al Ismaelia is wholly owned by Samai Hills Ltd., a real estate company based in the British Virgin Islands on whose executive board sits Samih's older brother, Naguib. Alongside his business activities, Naguib is the founder of the secular, free-market orientated Free Egyptians Party which has supported the candidacy of Abd al-Fatah al-Sisi in presidential elections since its creation in 2011. Al Ismaelia company finances itself through private direct investment and loans, recently securing an 8.5 million USD loan from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (Berger, 2014; Fayed, 2009; Hussein, 2017; Saleh, 2018).

Al Ismaelia acquires buildings by buying owners and tenants' property and rent contracts, or offering financial compensation for relocation. Due to the low density of permanent residents and the dilapidated state of many Downtown properties, real estate can often be purchased at below market price before extensive renovations are carried out to

increase their value. Sale negotiations have proved lengthy, however. High levels of vacancy mean some owners cannot be found, poorer residents do not wish to sell rent-controlled homes, legal papers may be missing, and many buildings have over one hundred owners due to years of inherited Old Rent contracts split between family members, all of whom must individually agree to sell (Shafei, 2015; El-Kazaz, 2018). Since the passing of Law 144/2006, the company must also first obtain permission from NOUH before any restoration can take place on listed buildings, although this is little obstacle for the political connections of the Sawiris family (Rabie, 2015; Fayed, 2009).

1. A Cultural Vision for Development

Al Ismaelia's development aesthetic and PR rhetoric draws heavily upon the heritisation of Downtown's *belle époque* architecture and nostalgia for a 'golden age' of cosmopolitanism and culture, as described above. The choice of company name alone is telling – a homage to Khedive Isma'il Pasha as the architect of Downtown's nineteenth century Haussmanisation; the “physical imposition of the geographical imagination of colonialism” (Selim, 2015, 183) through European-style modernity and urban exclusion. It purchases heritage sites with an aim to renovate buildings with a vision of diverse, upscale usage such as stylish apartments, art galleries and high-end commercial spaces. Adjoining properties are sought after, aiming for aesthetic and social congruity. Notable properties already acquired by Al Ismaelia include the Tawakol Building which houses Café Riche; the former Viennoise Hotel building first owned by Egyptian-Lebanese businessman Abdallah Mirshak and confiscated by the Nasser administration whereupon it fell into disrepair, now transformed into an exhibition space and headquarters of Sarwa Capital investment company; and the Davies Bryan Building which in 1910 housed the

largest branch in the world of the British department store Davies Bryan before its purchase by the Syrian Chourbagui brothers in 1957 (Fayed, 2009).

In tandem with this historical slant is Al Ismaelia's celebration of Downtown as a centre for the arts in recognition of the independent and experimental cultural scene that re-emerged in the 1990s and again in the aftermath of the 2011 revolution (Abaza, 2014). This approach conceives of heritage as more than the materiality of property value and condition; it emphasises the 'intangible heritage' of a neighbourhood's social and cultural capital. Post-2012, the company bought up buildings housing some of area's most established cultural initiatives—Townhouse Gallery, Contemporary Image Collective and Studio Emad Eddin—and lets out short-term, low-cost leases to smaller artistic ventures. It has collaborated with Cairo-based urban research organisation CLUSTER on projects to refurbish two of Downtown's pedestrianised passageways, run a guided tour of the neighbourhood's architecture, and other documentation projects (CLUSTER, n.d.). And as mentioned above, it has partnered with MO4 media agency to produce the @DowntownCairo social media presence – advertising not so much Al Ismaelia's properties, but the lifestyle and aesthetic of a forgotten gilded era in the city.

In 2012 Al Ismaelia also founded the annual Downtown Contemporary Arts Festival (D-CAF), now the largest and longest-running international arts festival in contemporary Egypt. D-CAF is growing year on year and attracts a range of domestic and international talent and wide media coverage. Al Ismaelia provides partial funding (the rest is leveraged from typical sources such as the EU, British Council, Goethe-Institut, Institut français d'Égypte or Arab Fund for Arts and Culture) and festival venues across the city, such as its

refurbished Viennoise Hotel building (Berger, 2014). Investment in culture and the arts is a typical method of rejuvenating neighbourhoods, drawing on the perceived generative properties of the ‘creative class’ (Florida, 2002). To what extent the organic spontaneity of city life can be commercially reproduced through this method remains in question, however.

2. Gentrification, Interrupted

Naturally, criticisms of gentrification and social exclusion have been levied at the company by local communities, certain academics and commentators (Fayed, 2009; Berger, 2014; Awatta; 2015). As Ania Szremski (2012) observes, “Ismaelia is invested in a speculative waiting game, sitting tight on its properties until the market improves, counting on events like D-CAF to provide downtown with the cultural cache needed to drive up market values”. Comparisons to Lebanese private real estate company Solidare and the gentrified restoration of post-conflict Downtown Beirut are commonly invoked, despite the widely differing contexts and outcomes (Naji 2015; Elshahed, 2015). Periods of national unrest (civil war and the neoliberal Hariri administration in Lebanon; revolution, regime change and structural adjustment austerity in Egypt) provide an entry point for private finance into markets refrontiered by violence, packaged as restoration and a return to civility (Klein, 2007).

In the case of Downtown Cairo, it is expected that the sharp upswing in value after the transformation from dilapidated to high-end properties will affect sale, rental and property taxes rates in the surrounding area and the demographics those who live, work and visit the area by forcing poorer citizens out in favour of those with greater spending power. This follows Eric Clark’s definition of gentrification as:

“A process involving a change in the population of land-users such that the new users are of a higher socio-economic status than the previous users, together with an associated change in the built environment through a reinvestment in fixed capital... Any process of change fitting this description is, to my understanding, Gentrification.” (2005, 258)

Mohammed Elshahed (2015) offers a more contextually nuanced view, highlighting how although gentrification has taken place in the city centre, contradictions in Cairo’s urban politics and lack of coherent municipal policies have so far mitigated an expedited private monopoly of space. Old Rent laws at once exacerbate the degradation of the built environment (through discouraging maintenance and renovation) and simultaneously preserve it from gentrification (through hindering private acquisition through long-winded legal battles, or by poor living conditions discouraging middle classes moving into the area to take advantage of the rent gap). So far, Al Ismaelia’s reach appears to have been limited only by these legal roadblocks.

Al Ismaelia denies its detractors’ charges of gentrification. It professes to recognise the heterogeneity of Downtown’s current demographic composition, stating that it aims to “attract a range of residential and commercial tenants with the purpose of revitalizing Downtown Cairo as a location with appeal for all segments of Egyptian society” (Al Ismaelia, n.d.) under the marketing campaign ‘A Downtown For All’. Speaking at the 2015 Creative Cities conference hosted by CLUSTER, Al Ismaelia Chairman Karim Shafei described the rationale behind the company’s vision in the following words:

“The only vibrant sector in downtown is a retail scene that is so exclusive to a single socio-economic segment that it almost prohibits the use of the space by other strata of society. Whereas city centres are characterised by their diversity and their ability to accommodate various types of users, Downtown Cairo offered few or no activities for members of the middle class and affluent societies... Such a view [‘A Downtown for All’] means that we envision a Downtown that is diversified, that is welcoming to various socioeconomic segments. A Downtown that is not exclusive to either a more financially capable group or a price sensitive group. A Downtown that enjoys various types of activities: touristic, offices, retail, entertainment and residential. A Downtown whose activities target different economic groups while offering safe, accessible and affordable public space.” (2015, 65)

A diverse social-economic vision for Downtown is commendable, but the veracity of this aspiration and the feasibility of its realisation remains in question. Given that the “middle class and affluent societies” are able to access huge privileges their less well-off counterparts cannot (regarding spatial access this includes places such as gated compounds, shopping malls with armed guards, recreational spaces with strict door policies, and so on), it is hard to sympathise with the lack of high-end activities on offer in Downtown for this class, even with the justification of preservation of and contact with national heritage. This is not to argue the case for social apartheid and a ghettoised city centre, but to question the above claims of a more equitable use of communal space. It is difficult to see how Al Ismaelia’s project will not adversely affect the poor, even with the legal brakes applied to property acquisition as outlined by Elshahed above. Given the lower socio-economic status of those that live and work in the kinds of dilapidated buildings Al Ismaelia may target, the ability of these classes to find work and accommodation elsewhere (even given financial

compensation for relocation) is less than their monied counterparts. This also does not take into account the necessity of the informal economy for the survival of Cairo's most impoverished. Informal small business spaces find no place in Al Ismaelia's corporate contract model of ownership. 'Downtown for All' as part of a private profit-seeking venture, endorsed by the Sisi government, is hard to imagine.

The same goes for Al Ismaelia's cultural patronage. D-CAF's website claimed the 2017 edition of the festival as being "made entirely in Egypt by a young Egyptian generation that is proud of its heritage and taking charge of its future." (D-CAF, 2017). Whilst the dedication and talent of the festival's employees is not in question, D-CAF's (and by extension its founder and benefactor Al Ismaelia) exulted vision of a future Downtown is false. Cultural and socioeconomic inclusion is limited by D-CAF's programme of experimental art forms, and advertisements and ticket prices aimed at a largely English-speaking, educated audience with a disposable income. Its venues are pre-established spaces of the monied elites such as AUC's Falaki Theatre or the GrEEK Campus technology park, cut off from the rest of the city by high walls and private security guards (Jankowicz, 2014). Incidentally, the latter self-describes as "the world's first heritage-driven technology center" (GrEEK Campus, n.d.), given its architectural pedigree as a 1900s Greek school, then later AUC campus, now leased to venture capital firm Sawari Ventures for private company use; a "mini Silicon Valley" in the heart of Downtown (Awad, 2016).

As the government makes raids on other forms of informal, independent culture expression, their endorsement of Al Ismaelia and lack of interference in initiatives such as D-CAF are telling. In 2015 D-CAF held some of its performances in Downtown's streets,

alleyways and public squares. This provoked controversy given the cancellation of the Al-Fann Midan festival's performance licences a year prior (although from 2016 onwards all D-CAF performances have been private). The message is clear – the kind of revolutionary-inspired popular artistic expression organised by civil society and local communities is not permitted; acceptable art is the corporate-driven events of a monied class with an international roster of participants and donors performing behind closed doors. Positioning themselves alongside Al Ismaelia and D-CAF also serves to portray the government as a patron of the arts, mitigating fallout from ongoing government-sanctioned detention of artists, writers and their communities and the raids on Downtown cultural institutions over the past few years (Al-Bawaba, 2017; Magid, 2016; Naji, 2016; Mada Masr, 2017).

3. Identity Formation

Can Al Ismaelia's project be considered a form of corporate recolonisation given its ability to impose spatial sorting? Ownership of a symbolic national space is being passed into private, semi-foreign hands in pursuit of profit, in the same manner it was constructed 150 years ago – coloured with irony given the company's penchant for colonial-style, *belle époque* imagery. Al Ismaelia's attempt to repackage this development as authentically Egyptian is interesting in this regard. Consider Karim Shafei's following statement:

“With the start of the twenty-first century, Egypt was also witnessing a very important shift as Egyptians started pushing away the two imported and conflicting cultures that governed the country's society over the previous three decades: Arab/Islamic culture and American culture. The shift came in favour of the Egyptianisation of society, taking the country back to what many believed in Egypt's "true and original" identity. This nostalgic definition has often been linked

to Egypt's perceived golden days: the first half of the twentieth century... Al Ismaelia for Real Estate Investment started in 2008, tapping into the renewed interest in the revival of that Egyptian identity, and the links that this had to Downtown." (2015, 63-64)

The interaction between the 'global', 'local' and 'modernity' within the Egyptian context is well-established in intellectual and popular debate (Peterson, 2011; Ghannam, 2002; Singerman & Amar, 2006). Shafei's statement above indicates Al Ismaelia's canny engagement with this. He locates Downtown as a stage for national identity, thus legitimating Al Ismaelia's incursion on the grounds of heritage preservation and a demonstration of worth through their capacity to negotiate an authentic Egyptian modernity. Their vision takes care to present itself as not too local (read: lower-middle class) thus robbing it of elite social capital; and not too global, thus avoiding accusations of submission to Western cultural imperialism. Given the lack of pre-existing residential community ties in Downtown, the identity of Al Ismaelia's intended user (future residents, gallery visitors, etc.) is constructed around shared consumption—commercial and cultural—of this perceived authentic modernity. It is at once high-end (Al Ismaelia is a luxury developer) but culturally credible (it draws on the nostalgic heritisation of national architectural patrimony *and* celebrates local forms of artistic expression and bohemian organicity, something which new-build luxury desert compounds or internationally-branded shopping malls cannot). The case of Al Ismaelia thus applies to Mark Allen Peterson's discussion of neoliberal globalisation and contemporary Cairo as "not so much cases of foreign imperialism imposing itself on helpless Egyptians as they are processes managed by Cairene entrepreneurs [Al Ismaelia in this case], who are making a buck while

creating the kinds of environments they and their families need to socially construct themselves as cosmopolitan” (2011, 171).

Sarah El-Kazaz terms this identity construction as the attempt to foster a “community of strangers” (2018, 490) where none previously existed, in order to enhance their market desirability. The company’s vision for development is enclavic, grouping similar buildings (and thus the individuals that frequent them) together. Al Ismaelia retains control over the functions and activities of its renovated properties by making them available only to rent and not resale. In doing so, this becomes a tool for demographic engineering. The kind of lifestyle promoted by Al Ismaelia is a form of social sorting; entrance to these spaces of residence and leisure incline naturally to the upper-middle educated classes, or even the lower if citizens can prove culturally appreciative in the right sort of way. Access is thus self-regulating and self-selecting; culture becomes a litmus test for respectability. Al Ismaelia therefore creates a utopia that at once exploits the spontaneous excitement of dynamic urban disorder, whilst distancing itself from the problems associated with *actual* disorder (security and safety threats that are associated with the poor, or Downtown as a location of political protest) by using urban development and cultural patronage as a method of spatial exclusion. This addresses the concerns of wealthier Cairenes who have left the centre for the security of the city’s modern gated developments, albeit demonstrating a “soft rather than physical modality through which Ismailia polices its boundaries” (El-Kazaz, 2018, 498). A comparison to Khaled Adham’s description of the colonial-era Shepherd Hotel resonate once more with the present:

“Scenes from an ‘oriental’ way of life were passing below the terrace against which the silhouette of minarets and domes of medieval Cairo could be seen. The architectural style of the hotel was very European. This style and its location overlooking old Cairo reflected the tourists’ desire for authentic, exotic experiences while retaining the amenities of modern life: *seeing the other culture while keeping a comfortable distance.*” (2004, 148-149, emphasis added)

F. Chapter Conclusion

A seeming paradox stands before us. Despite the current regime’s repressive methods of social and spatial control and a historic lack of constructive state urban regeneration policy, a more positive cultural revival exists concurrently within the same geographic area. This revival is associated with the popular *belle époque* heritage movement from the 1990s onwards articulated via nostalgia for a perceived bygone ‘Golden Age’ of cultural refinement, liberal values and enlightenment. This is not merely an amnesic negation of colonial cruelty, but should be read within the wider trend towards unregulated market liberalism witnessed globally since the 1980s which has created growing inequality within neoliberal societies. This parallel is clear with regards to the kind of heritisation of Downtown Cairo that companies such as Al Ismaelia and other forms of cultural production are leading – both aesthetically (a celebration of wealth and beauty, and its association with progress and enlightenment), socially (an exclusivist, enclavic Downtown reimaged around pockets of high-end consumption), and financially (the primacy of private ownership and privatisation of urban development and heritisation). It also resounds with the ways in which colonialism itself can be considered – both as violent oppression and the ‘liberal imperialism’ of patriarchal development logics.

This paradigm can be considered representative of the government's past failure and current disinterest in investing in a state-led initiative to develop the area or protect national heritage, alongside any other robust strategy to improve the lives of its citizens living in a degraded urban environment. It also serves to expose the workings of a seemingly progressive form of neoliberalism, defined by Nancy Fraser as where "progressive forces are effectively joined with the forces of cognitive capitalism, especially financialisation" (2017). This idea has relevance to the development that is currently taking place in Downtown Cairo. In this case, progressive forces are those which seek to culturally and artistically reinvent the city (and the identities of its inhabitants) in the name of authenticity and conservation, whilst courting flows of global capitalism by marketing the city product. The fact that this strives to exclude the subaltern poor is only reinforced by Sisi's repressive security apparatus that violently clears street vendors, closes down street coffee shops and raids progressive cultural spaces (as well as fulfilling its own logics of negating the legacy of the 2011 Egyptian revolution). In this case, an idealised view of society and a city of aspiring global status is maintained by widespread repression, via both neoliberal development logics and the ruthless security state.

III. Making the New: Visions for a Global City

A. Chapter Introduction: New City Rising

The previous chapter discussed processes of heritisation in contemporary Cairo with reference to the restoration and promotion of Downtown's *belle époque* Khedival architecture, which is being formulated around exclusivist, enclavic notions of cultural and commercial consumption. The following chapter will focus on a second imaginary of elite space: the hypermodern luxury new developments of Egypt's expanding real-estate sector. This takes the focus out of Cairo's centre to its peripheries – the new towns, satellite cities and gated compounds of the desert, with a focus on the proposed New Administrative Capital mega-project set to replace Cairo as the national seat of power and drive global city status, revealing the driving structures of power and capital behind Egypt's economic, political and social apparatus.

1. Militarised Capitalism, *Infitāh* and Beyond

“Militarized state institutions and security agencies around the world are assuming new or newly-expanded roles as investors, contractors, and even corporate profiteers. They are advancing in areas formerly associated with private-sector business and non-military dimensions of the public sector.”

- Paul Amar, 2018, 84

In 1952 Muhammad Naguib and Gamal Abd al-Nasser's Free Officers Movement overthrew the khedival monarchy backed by British occupation, establishing the modern Egyptian republic. Under Nasserite socialism's vision of state-led development and public sector growth, Egypt transformed from an import to production-based economy. Egypt's military became the architect of modernisation, engine of industry and supplier of public services “*min al- 'ibra lil-ṣārūkh*” (“from needles to rockets”, quoted in Ibrahim, 2017) as

declared by Nasser in 1962. Its officers, engineers and contractors replaced civilian managers to take key roles in public infrastructure projects, consumer and industrial manufacturing and the provision of basic commodities. Pan-Arab nationalism and wars with neighbouring Israel further justified the Egyptian Armed Forces' premier status within the country's political and industrial apparatus (Marshall, 2015).

In 1974, four years after his inauguration following the death of Gamal Abd al-Nasser, President Muhammad Anwar al-Sadat announced a new national policy of *infītāḥ* ('openness'). This is customarily described as the "opening of the door" of Egypt's markets to foreign private investment, notably new Western partners. As Mark Allen Peterson notes, convention often retells *infītāḥ*'s advent as an abrupt divide between Egypt's socialist and capitalist political histories, eliding the complexities and gradualism of real-world change. Nonetheless, this somewhat binary distinction remains useful as a broad marker of the post-1952 ruling classes' differing visions of Egyptian modernity, understood as "accurately express[ing] the way most people articulate their economic experiences" (2011, 175).

Market liberalisation introduced the privatisation of parts of state-owned enterprises previously managed by military personnel, who found themselves in competition with a rising core of non-military capitalist elites. Sadat replaced officers retiring from public service with civilians and refocused EAF taskings around war efforts against Israel when conflicts broke out in 1967 and 1973. After the signing of the Camp David Accords and subsequent 1979 peace treaty with Israel, a shift to peace-time contingency threatened to further erode the EAF's influence and privileges. Although the military was able to retain certain financial and industrial privileges, their economic return decreased as the state's

market power declined relative to private investors. As a result, military leaders moved to diversify their formerly statist economic portfolios in Egypt's liberalising markets by leveraging capital from new private partnerships. Instead of soldiers for the battlefield, mandatory conscription provided thousands of men to staff factories producing non-military goods or undertake construction work on EAF projects – cheap labour exempt from protection under civilian labour laws. The officer classes reinvented themselves as quasi-private sector businessmen with new opportunities for patronage and personal profit, as well as cultivating strategic domestic and foreign commercial connections particularly with the US and oil-rich Gulf nations (Abul-Magd, 2017; Marshall, 2015).

US strategic interests in particular have been significant in permitting the EAF to maintain its relevance as a key Egyptian powerbroker. *Al Jazeera* reports that “Since 1979, Egypt has been receiving uninterrupted aid [from the United States] at an average of \$1.6bn a year, the bulk of which goes to the military” (Najjar, 2017). Sadat's acquiescence to Camp David and Washington's enduring desire to maintain Israel's stability within the region qualified Egypt as a recipient of economic and military assistance to ensure Cairo's submissive diplomatic posture. This also followed the 1969 Nixon Doctrine which proposed the fortification of US international ambitions through strategic partnerships and development of regional allies against the backdrop of the Cold War. Drawing on Ruy Mauro Marini's (1965) concept of 'sub-imperialist' states that accompany and maintain the international hegemonic ambitions of their benefactors, US military aid to Egypt enabled the outsourcing of Washington's geopolitical security priorities to Cairo in their *sub-imperialist role as an associated gendarmerie* of the United States. In doing so, this has allowed the EAF to procure sophisticated defence material and further develop a prominent

business and manufacturing base over the past forty years; Egypt is currently the third highest recipient of US military aid worldwide after Afghanistan and Israel.

Washington's strategic interests alongside the growing global influence of the Bretton Woods institutions in the post-Cold War era also compelled Egypt to adopt the IMF's Economic Reform and Structural Adjustment Program in 1991. The Egyptian pound collapsed against the dollar, government budgets were reduced, and a number of public sector enterprises reorganised into holding companies for privatisation or closure: by 1999 subsidies were downsized by 76-percent and privatisation of the industrial sector grew from 58.3 to 81.8-percent. Heavy industries were largely replaced by a manufacturing sector orientated towards consumer and intermediary goods, such as cement and steel for the construction industry as one of the few growth economic sectors. Further changes to financial legislation were made to attract foreign capital and businesses, global franchise operations, and tourists to the capital (Mitchell, 2002; Vignal & Denis, 2006; Singerman, 2009; Kandil, 2016a). However, this should not be conflated as a wholesale neoliberalisation of state apparatus. As Timothy Mitchell describes:

“The [IMF] reform program did not remove the state from the market or eliminate profligate public subsidies. Its main impact was to concentrate public funds into different hands, and many fewer. The state turned resources away from agriculture and industry and the underlying problems of training and employment. It now subsidized financiers instead of factories, cement kilns instead of bakeries, speculators instead of schools.” (2002, 282)

Under Mubarak's nepotism a small group of wealthy Egyptian tycoons rose to prominence: billionaire family conglomerates such as the Baghat, Orascom, Mansour, Talaat Mustafa and Seoudi Groups courted into circles of power, often generating their wealth through lucrative supply contracts to the military and stakes in real estate development, preferential tax breaks and foreign partners (Mitchell, 2002; Kandil, 2016a). In 2004 a cabinet reshuffle saw businessmen affiliated with the National Democratic Party (NDP) appointed to ministry posts directly related to their personal enterprises. Mubarak also empowered state security police forces, the Ministry of the Interior and civilian intelligence services to cultivate an alternative base of support to the EAF. The military retained its relevancy however: it mitigated structural adjustment public cuts with continued US aid, and Mubarak continued to appoint its upper cadres in positions of political power as a deterrent to possible leadership coups as he prepared his son Gamal—a former investment banker and confidant of Egypt's business elites—to inherit the presidency. A mixed class of civilian and military business and political elites thus rose from this clientelism (Kandil, 2016a; Kandil, 2016b; Abul-Magd, 2017).

In 2011, the military's refusal to save a hated regime and turn on civilian demonstrators—albeit after a period of careful watching to assess the balance of power—finally forced Mubarak from office: “*al-gaysh wa al-sha'b iyd waḥda*” (“the army and the people are one hand”) became a popular chant in Tahrir and beyond. SCAF stepped in as caretaker rulers, overseeing free elections in 2012, the second in Egypt's history to field more than one candidate. The following year, the coup d'état of General Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi removed the contested Muslim Brotherhood government of Muhammad Morsi, whose thirteen-month premiership represents the only occasion a civilian has held the seat of power in Egypt in almost seven decades. The EAF thus stands as one of the few national

militaries that have weathered the instability of the Arab Spring uprisings: an untouchable ‘deep-state’ able to publicly present as heroes of the nation distinct from Mubarak’s repressive police force, and the singular competent national institution – a view seemingly shared by many Western diplomats and international investors alike, particularly the anti-Muslim Brotherhood autocratic governments of Saudi Arabia and the UAE which have sent huge packages in financial assistance since 2013. Two weeks after Sisi was sworn into office, the US too resumed its billion-dollar military aid programme that had been frozen under the Morsi administration (Awad, 2012; Topol, 2014; Marshall, 2015).

“There is no question that the military has returned in force to the heart of the regime” (2016b, 7) says Hazem Kandil of the current administration: the NDP of Sadat and Mubarak was dissolved in 2011 and Sisi has chosen to rule through the presidential office alone with an executive inner-circle of former servicemen. As of March 2019, 20 of Egypt’s 27 provincial governors held military backgrounds (Iyhab, 2018; Middle East Eye, 2019) and unlike his predecessor, Sisi makes public appearances in his army uniform. Large state projects still require wealthy private investors however, and the EAF has moved swiftly to reassert its economic empire, seeking rapprochement with established civilian business elites, including those with ties to former administrations. Prominent businessmen such as Naguib Sawiris, Ahmed Abou Hashima and Ahmed Ezz—as well as celebrities, banks and the general population—have donated to Sisi’s much-publicised Tahya Masr (‘Long Live Egypt’) fund, established in July 2014 to ‘rebuild Egypt’ under the new administration. Since 2014 military-affiliated institutions have increasingly taken over projects or partnered with other ministries and state enterprises – a September 2013 decree removed the need for due tender processes in cases of undefined urgency (Kandil, 2016a; Marshall, 2015; Attalah & Hamama, 2016). Indeed, Shana Marshall (2015) describes the EAF as

“the primary gatekeeper for the Egyptian economy”: it controls and coordinates an increasing number of major state-run projects; ex-generals can be found in political appointments and company boardrooms; its factories produce everything from ammunition to cutlery, washing machines to olive oil. It runs banks, hotels, fish farms, beach resorts, water treatment and solar power plants, real estate and import companies; builds roads, bridges, malls, sports clubs, university student accommodation (Abul-Magd, 2017; Amar, 2018; Topol, 2014). The blurring of state and business interests permits worrying new economic paradigms to emerge: companies owned solely by the military are exempt from tax regardless of function. Military personnel can collect profits from projects, but if also classed as state entities debt can be shifted onto tax-payers. With the EAF’s budget unpublished, it is difficult to quantify how far their reach extends or leverage accountability – estimates vary from around 5 to 40-percent of the national economy (Marshall, 2015). Civilian partners and subcontractors may also harbour military connections – awarding lucrative state contracts to the firms of former officers is common practice in the “republic of retired generals” (Elshahed, 2014). Demonstrating the veracity of the EAF’s claims to competency take second place to economic partisanism.

The Ramsis Station disaster of February 2019 is illustrative in this regard: Minister for Transport Hisham Arafat resigned from his post following a train crash in central Cairo that killed 25 people, replaced by close Sisi ally General Kamel al-Wazir – the first time in nearly 60 years that the office has been controlled by a non-civilian. As former chairman to the Engineering Authority of the Armed Forces (EAAF, *al-hayy’a al-handasīyya lil-quwwāt al-musalaha*, affiliated with the Ministry of Defence) this signals a likely subordination of the ministry to the military agency under al-Wazir’s leadership, further expanding the EAF’s patronage network. Upon al-Wazir’s appointment (and promotion

from Major General to Lieutenant General), President Sisi pledged full military support and financing for the new incumbent's plans. This follows the now-resigned Arafat's requests in 2017 for 10 billion EGP (570 million USD) in urgent railway network overhaul which were publicly rebuked by the president, despite profligate government spending on prestige mega-project construction (Middle East Eye, 2019).

The forecast for the future appears set to further confirm the military's status over the nation. In April 2019 constitutional amendments were passed via referendum that remove the two four-year presidential term limit imposed by the 2014 constitution, meaning President Sisi is theoretically able to stay in power until at least 2030 (BBC News, 2019). The EAF's mandate was also extended, redefined as "preserving democracy and the Constitution, protecting the basic principles of the state and its civilian nature, and protecting people's rights and individual freedoms" (Mostafa, 2019). This breaks with Egypt's previous nine constitutions since its first in 1882, where the military's role has been generally limited to the single task of "protecting the country and preserving its security and territorial integrity" (Ibid.). The seemingly deliberately vague nature of what may constitute a threat to civil freedom or democracy raises potential for military intervention in election proceedings and other political affairs, or undermining the balancing principles of the separation of powers by placing military generals as the final arbiters of the constitution. These changes also allow the president to exercise greater powers of patronage over senior state judiciary and extend use of military trials for civilians. Veto power has also been granted to SCAF over the Defence Minister portfolio (BBC, 2019; Kennedy, 2019; Cairo Institute of Human Rights Studies, 2019). This reemphasises the trope that the EAF are the only Egyptian entity capable of carrying out government functions, beyond responsibilities for national defence, with much-publicised

stunts such as the military's provision of infant formula during a 2016 national shortage. The line between what is 'state' and what is 'military' is thus porous and uncertain, blurring conceptions of Egypt's economy as a classic formation of free market neoliberalism, despite the hallmarks of privatisation, IMF-backed austerity and ingress of foreign capital.

The reestablishment of the military at the heart of Egypt's political and economic apparatus has not translated to long-term sustainable societal growth or equitable improvements to quality of life for the wider population (Mitchell, 2002; Kandil, 2016b; De Koning, 2006). The decades since *infitāh* are characterised by the gradual withdrawal of state commitment to the Nasserite social contract and a widening of societal inequalities, allowing only military and business elites and a limited, relatively affluent upper class “whose members are employed in the more internationally oriented segments of the urban economy” (De Koning, 2009, xx) to prosper. Rather, the steady decline of real wages and reduction in government services and subsidies, exacerbated by fiscal policy such as the IMF-backed floatation of the Egyptian pound in 2016, has made life increasingly difficult for a majority of Cairenes, with UNICEF (2017) reporting that the poverty rate in Egypt grew to 28-percent in 2015. Although national economic growth is slowly increasing — averaging 5.3-percent in the 2017/2018 fiscal year—this does not take into account weak state wealth redistribution mechanisms and Egypt's cumbersome centralised governmental bureaucracy. Social spending is likely to be further adversely affected by Egypt's sizeable public debt burden (the declining yields on which make Egypt less attractive to emerging market investors) and the end of IMF financing in June 2019 (World Bank, 2019). It is the poorest in society who will feel the effects most keenly.

B. Informality, Mega-Projects and the Call of the Desert

A number of master plans, city visions and urban strategies have been proposed for the Greater Cairo Region in the post-1952 period. Gamal Abd al-Nasser's 1969 Greater Cairo Region Master Scheme imagined four new-build satellite towns to absorb new waves of rural-urban migration to the capital, although no construction ever took place. Efforts were instead focused closer towards the centre; city infrastructure and planned districts for workers near new production poles such as Helwan's iron and steel or Shubra al-Khayma's textile industries, or the middle-class neighbourhoods of Muhandisin and Nasr City for engineers and military officers respectively: blueprints for living for a new, modern citizen articulated around profession and contribution to the national project (Selim, 2015). By 1965 Cairo Governate had constructed 15,000 public housing units of mostly small tenements for families of limited income.

The shift to a wartime economy in 1967 halted state construction, remaining in place through the years of attrition and second outbreak of conflict in 1973. Whereas during the 1950s "virtually the whole of Cairo could be considered as formal" (Sims, 2011, 46) (in that any new construction projects were carried out according to the real-estate and land usage laws of the time), by the mid-1960s the first informal or '*ashwā'ī*' (literal meaning 'random' or 'without plan', pl. '*ashwā'īyyāt*') areas appeared as extant housing began to deteriorate. This includes extensions and modifications to existing homes, new buildings and neighbourhoods spilling out from the edges of the city established without government permission or heed to official regulations, boosted by the flow of remittances to Cairo from Egyptians working in construction and oil in the Gulf. Unregulated construction has been illegal since the late 1970s and successive Egyptian governments have proposed Urban Growth Boundaries to stem Cairo's sprawl, but bribery, corruption, and weak and indifferent municipal oversight has failed to uphold the law, in doing so alleviating

immediate pressure on the government to provide public housing. Indeed, around 84-percent of new buildings constructed in Cairo between 1975 and 1990 are considered to be informal, demonstrating the lack of state provision for public housing in the post-*infitāḥ* period. Today, 11 million (over 60-percent) of Greater Cairo's inhabitants reside in informal areas which constitute around 40-percent of the metropolis' built-up area, highlighting the issue of population over-densification that parts of the city currently face. Informal neighbourhoods run the gamut from unsafe, squalid slums cut off from public amenities to more middle-class dwellings with a higher quality of living (Sims, 2015; Sims, 2016; Rocco, 2013; El Shakry, 2006; Nada, 2014). As convincingly argued by many—most notably urban planner David Sims (2011, 2015 & 2016)—whilst not overselling its functionality, Cairo's informality is largely inherent, rather than anathematic, to the city's operational logic, filling a void left by the state's social disengagement and providing flexible and affordable opportunities for citizens to live. As discussed in Chapter One, the decrepitude of formal areas such as Downtown Cairo exacerbated by antiquated property laws does not necessarily equate formality with order and comfort. Indeed, as Khaled Adham (2004) notes, “many inhabitants of these informal, urban, marginal areas are not migrants from the countryside, but rather educated professionals and governmental employees, who moved from within the city” (156). Whilst not obscuring the daily abject poverty experienced by many Cairenes and the inadequacies of unplanned dwellings, this refines the Third World ‘planet of slums’ (Davis, 2006) dystopian narrative that Cairo's informality may be assumed to singularly represent.

Large public housing projects have steadily disappeared from the contemporary Cairene cityscape. In the last thirty years only a handful of urban renewal schemes and new formal housing projects have been undertaken by the state within Cairo itself, such as

Zahra' al-Ma'adi or extensions to Nasr City, catering overwhelmingly to an upper-middle class clientele (Sims, 2011). Both government housing initiatives and private developers have instead coalesced around a high-end residential market. This shift is also reflected in other construction sectors with new trends for luxury tourist, leisure and commercial developments. Reflecting the ethos of *infitāh*, GOPP became the mediator for Egyptian-foreign client-donor relationships allowing Western aid and investment to flow into the country, partnering with the World Bank, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and others (TADAMUN, 2014a). From the 1980s onwards GOPP's successive land use plans have almost obsessively relied on new-build desert expansion for construction framed as a dual-value solution to overcrowding and a guarantor of economic growth. This belief has produced the new desert cities, dis-embedded from their own social landscapes, that have come to define Cairo's peripheries.

There are two main factors that have facilitated the process of desert development. First, the desert by nature functions as a blank canvas where the complexities of pre-existing populations and their claims to the land do not require negotiation: not only is this easier to initiate construction, but the suitability, worth and purpose of the development itself demands less scrutiny. A case in point are the sparsely residentially-populated declining formal areas such as Downtown: estimates of the number of unoccupied existing apartment buildings across Greater Cairo range from 1 to 5.5 million (Mohie, 2015; Rios, 2015), yet new developments remain the preferred response to overcrowding in *'ashwā'īyyāt*. As Sims and Mitchell note, Egypt's deserts differ from those of its North African neighbours – not only are they almost ubiquitous—deserts account for 96-percent of the country's total area—but also “only in Egypt does the capital city and just about every other major urban area adjoin desert lands, as does most of the coastline and much

of the country's cultivated area" (Mitchell, 2015, xxi). This must also be considered within the frame of military capitalism: in 1997, a presidential decree granted the EAF usage rights over all undeveloped non-agricultural land, comprising around 87-percent of the country (Elshahed, 2014). This concentrates total power over one of the most profitable national resources in the hands an impenetrable, absolute authority, further contributing to the military's reasserted economic and political centrality.

Second, real-estate and land speculation is a phenomenon common to many developing economies of which Egypt is no exception. Debt crises, weak markets and IMF shock therapy discourages investment in domestic industries and public services. High inflation and currency devaluation discourage savings, whereupon investment in real-estate becomes a safer way to transform money into a tangible asset that can also be sold in foreign currency. Lucrative property bubbles thus may emerge amidst economies that are otherwise stagnating (Davis, 2006). As a result, attracting ex-patriate buyers or wealthier Egyptians who live abroad provides a business model for higher-end properties – non-Egyptians have been able to own land since 2007 which pushed real estate prices higher as an influx of largely Gulf capital entered the market, and in 2017 Prime Minister Mustafa Madbouli announced new legislation to facilitate property transactions in foreign currencies (Mohie, 2015; Hafez, 2018). The American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt reports that Egypt's real estate sector has proved remarkably resilient to political and economic uncertainty, feeding into more than 90 industries and consistently accounting for around 9-percent of national GDP since 2012 (American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt, 2016). Supply rather than demand thus continues to drive desert development in the governmental paradigm of GDP growth through real estate speculation. Simply, land sales and new construction projects are more profitable than upgrading existing urban areas.

Additionally, given the questionable legal status of informal settlements government officials argue that investment in these communities would serve to sanction and encourage the act of illegal construction, read: effectively bestow land rights upon citizens and thus erode state jurisdiction to re-appropriate land if needed (TADAMUN, 2014a).

In addition to typical real estate development, a reinvigorated pursuit of the mega-project under the current administration also emerges from the Egyptian propensity for desert speculation. Bent Flyvbjerg notes that mega-projects have “come to constitute eight-percent of global gross domestic product” (quoted in Leslie, 2015) and as such, can be assumed to offer a short-cut to growth. The immensity of large infrastructure or prestige mega-construction operate at “material and poetic registers” (Carse, 2014, 13) that resonate with a political sublime – “the rapture politicians get from building monuments to themselves and their causes” (Flyvbjerg, 2014, 7); a projection of state power in its “phallic nationalism” (Amar, 2018, 86). The current regime appears to have embraces this: President Sisi is overseeing the construction of two giant flagship developments in the New Administrative Capital and the Suez Canal Corridor Project, in addition to dramatically expanding the existing Toshka New Valley land reclamation project in the Western Desert which has faced many technical difficulties since its construction in 1995 (Marshall, 2015).

Both of these development forms—smaller scale real estate development and the mega-project—have found significant traction within the machinations of military capitalism due to the EAF’s uncontested desert land monopoly. This has allowed the military to function as the main speculative authority for investment in and contracting of new-build projects, empowering their political and economic capacities by building on and leveraging new foreign partnerships for investment capital and establishing a hold within networks of

global supply. As a result, Egypt's political economy is increasingly reliant on its relationships, particularly with Saudi Arabia and the UAE who comprise a large proportion of foreign investors (Deknatel, 2012) as well as alternative sources of capital such as Chinese foreign direct investment, with the EAF occupying a strategic role as broker to the nation.

1. The New Urban Communities Authority

“Cities are increasingly shaped more by the logic of the market than the needs of their inhabitants.”

- Asef Bayat and Kees Biekart, 2009, 815

If desert expansion is the vision, the New Urban Communities Authority (NUCA, *hayy'at al-mujtam 'āt al-'umrānīyya al-jadīda*) is its vehicle. Established by the 1979 Law 59/1979 for New Communities under the umbrella of the Ministry of Housing, Utilities and Urban Communities (MHUUC)⁵, NUCA's aim is “creating new civilized centers for achieving community stability and economic prosperity” with particular focus on the “redistribution of inhabitants far from the Nile valley” by “extend[ing] the Urban Axis to the desert and remote areas” (New Urban Communities Authority [NUCA], n.d.). The agency is thus the gatekeeper for land sales in the deserts surrounding Greater Cairo. Its internal mechanisms and mandate are notoriously opaque: Egyptian architect Yahya Shawkat describes it as a “black box” (quoted in Deknatel, 2012). Alongside the military, it is the largest land developer in Egypt, representing an uncontested concentration of power over land ownership which bypasses ministries, governorate authorities or other entities which possess only limited budgets and fiscal autonomy, demonstrating the top-down,

⁵ The present-day Ministry of Housing, Utilities and Urban Communities is comprised of the former Ministry of Urban Communities and the Ministry of Housing which were merged in September 2015.

highly centralised nature of Egyptian land commerce and development. Through NUCA, land is provided to relevant ministries for agricultural or industrial use, but its primary function is as the conduit for the permission, planning and implementation of Egypt's new settlements which are divided up and developed by military and private contractors in various ways – residential, leisure, commercial. This has allowed it to become a uniquely powerful political and economic authority that generates its own substantial revenue from land sales. NUCA's dividends are self-perpetuating, as David Sims explains:

“It needs to be underlined that virtually all financial surpluses generated by NUCA come from revenues extracted from the new towns around Cairo, and in particular Sheikh Zayed, New Cairo, and Sixth of October. Thus it is a case where the capture of the unearned increment of urban growth in Cairo's hinterland is being devoted either to further developing NUCA's new town portfolio throughout Egypt or to prestige national projects. In other words, the vast majority of inhabitants of the Greater Cairo metropolitan area see no benefit from the very profitable development of its own new towns... It is clear that NUCA is increasingly being used by the government as a cash-cow to finance prestige mega-projects such as the new administrative capital.” (2016, 70, emphasis in original)

NUCA developments are classified as either new towns with diverse self-supporting economic bases, satellite cities within 40 kilometres of Cairo, or new settlements established on Cairo's edge (Stewart, 1996). NUCA lists twenty-eight communities built or partially-built across the country since 1977, grouped into four chronological development tranches. Eight of these fall within the Greater Cairo Region: Sixth of October, Fifteenth of May, Badr, al-‘Ubur, Sheikh Zayid, al-Shuruq, el-Qahira el-Gedida

and Tenth of Ramadan⁶. The latest development tranche announced in 2014 includes the New Administrative Capital east of Tenth of Ramadan (TADAMUN, 2015; Sims, 2016).

In 2014 President Sisi relaunched the Social Housing Project (SHP): a Mubarak-era initiative stalled by the 2011 Revolution purporting to provide one million new housing units for low-income families, the majority of which are to be built by military contractors such as the EAAF in the NUCA towns of Sixth of October, Fifteenth of May, Badr and al-‘Ubur (Built Environment Observatory, 2018; Sims, 2016). NUCA’s stated aims also include the commitment to “the availability of housing units for the low Incomes [sic], aiming to raise the standard of living for this level” (NUCA, n.d.). Lower-end apartment blocks and smaller villas can be found in areas such as Sixth of October and El Rehab in el-Qahira el-Gedida which are gradually becoming absorbed into Cairo’s expanding peripheral suburbs. These older, more established centres also display signs of informal urban spread. Construction labourers may rent bed-spaces multiple occupants to a room and an unforeseen influx of Syrian migrants post-2011 chiefly in Sixth of October has altered the social composition of certain neighbourhoods (Omar, 2016).

Despite this, many commentators have noted how supposed value units are often outside of poorer citizen’s price range, left half-constructed and unconnected to city infrastructure and their peripheral location impractical without a private car. Journeys from the city centre may reach over an hour, and public transport networks leading to, or within

⁶ Depending on which boundary definition for Greater Cairo is observed, Tenth of Ramadan is sometimes not included as a Cairo settlement. There is no commonly agreed boundary, illustrating some of the bureaucratic difficulties encountered in Cairene urban planning. It is currently unclear if the future new capital will be included within the bounds of the Greater Cairo metropolitan area or not. See Sims, 2016, Chapter 2 ‘The Existing Governance System for Greater Cairo’ for further detail.

satellite settlements themselves are either non-existent or severely limited. Strict laws on building use mean the opening of small independent or informal businesses is almost completely prohibited, including retail spaces, offices, repair workshops or street kiosks. Given that 40-percent of Cairenes (generally at the lowest end of the socio-economic spectrum) are estimated to subsist off the informal economy, and only 11-percent of the city's households own a car, the intended targets of public housing initiatives are physically and financially unable to relocate. Those apartment blocks constructed for a modest-income clientele often soon rise in value given their location and proximity to higher-end neighbourhoods and facilities. As a result, even those units that are completed have not attracted residents in the numbers hoped for; vacancies in the public housing initiatives of Cairo's satellite cities commonly exceed 70-percent (Sims, 2011, 2015 & 2016; TADAMUN, 2015; Stewart, 1996; Tarbush, 2012). The logics of inner-city informality endure – the affordable rents, social community and geographic connection to the rest of Cairo proves more a more sustainable model of living, albeit not without drawbacks, for many households. Genuine government commitment to providing plausible cost-effective housing is proved false. Broadly speaking, the developments on Cairo's peripheries have not been designed to cater for the poor – a consequence of the exploitation of land ownership in an environment positively disposed towards military, private sector and foreign speculation and investment (Built Environment Observatory, 2018; TADAMUN, 2015).

Instead, desert development has coalesced around the private sector-led market for affluent consumption. One car journey in Cairo is enough to demonstrate this via the aggressive marketing of luxury gated compounds plastered on every billboard lining the city's major bridges and highways (Abaza, 2016). In 1995, Sheikh Zayed and al-Shuruq

became the first NUCA towns proposed that did not contain an industrial zone, giving way to the exclusivity of malls, golf courses and country clubs that have come to characterise Egypt's desert developments (Sims, 2015). Singerman (2009) notes how between 1998 and 2002, the Ministry of Housing dedicated 22-percent of their budget to NUCA, despite it serving less than 2-percent of the population. Cairo-based urban research and advocacy group TADAMUN describes the situation as such:

“[NUCA] has succeeded in deviating from its foundational professed commitment to social justice and providing affordable housing. NUCA has become a real estate agent that deals with the nation's land as a profit-maximizing resource leading to the distortion of the entire housing market. In light of this, Egypt's most abundant resource – land – has ironically become its most expensive and difficult to obtain resource. In a just urban governance system, land plays a social function rather than a purely economic one, based on a belief that the city belongs to everyone. Through NUCA's land-commodification practices, this principle has been totally lost, and Egypt's cities are being developed not for the general public, but for the privileged chosen few.” (2015)

Foreign capital, military contractors and large domestic private real-estate entities, enhanced by close relationships to the government via NUCA, have thus become the main agents for urban change within the city. The divergence between Nasser-era and NUCA-era new-build urban development is clear. The ‘pioneering ethic’ of Nasser-era development that sought to form new communities of citizens imbued with communitarian nationalist ethics stands in contrast to post-*infītāh* development which instead prioritises the constructions themselves and their transactional value, presuming their capacity to

attract residents and users almost as an afterthought (El Shakwry, 2006). Indeed, by 2006 the combined residential capacity of NUCA towns across the country totalled 20 million, yet less than one million people had resettled there, with the majority choosing those settlements closest to central Cairo (Sims, 2015). The role of the state as an entity responsible for providing for its citizens slips also further as management of municipal services and infrastructure is passed into the hands of private developers. The failure of successive Egyptian governments since the 1970s to create an effective and equitable system of urban management is clear.

C. Structures of Globality and their Meaning

“Cairo cosmopolitan, the globalizing metropolis, will not make us free.”

- Leïla Vignal and Eric Denis, 2006, 147

Infitāḥ and late-twentieth century globalisation galvanised a new ingress of foreign capital and influences into Egypt, tying its market into the global production and consumption chains of modern neoliberal economics. North American, European, Gulf and more recently Chinese architectural, engineering and construction firms and their investment money entered Egyptian real estate markets in large numbers during the 1990s. At the same time as the growing visibility of religiosity and the moralisation of public conduct, the deregulation of Egyptian media opened the country to the images and ideas of lifestyle living and consumer culture, particularly from the West and United States. Middle-class Egyptian professionals returning home from overseas employment in the Gulf oil sector brought experiences and new tastes for compound living and shopping malls, which in turn have been informed by ‘lifestyle’ concepts promoted in the US and Southeast Asia (Adham, 2004; Denis, 2006; Peterson, 2011; Abaza, 2006). Sadat envisioned Egypt’s future as one of affluence and aspirational spending, stating that the goal of every Egyptian

man should be to “get married, own a villa, drive a car, possess a television set and a stove, and eat three meals a day” (quoted in Ghannam, 2002, 29). Just as nineteenth-century globalised economic and elite consumer practices introduced the European department store to the streets of Downtown Cairo, with post-*infitāh* influxes came the new physical structures and spatial arrangements to house them; compounds, malls, fast-food restaurants, miniature theme parks – globalised mentalities inscribed in architectural form. Diane Singerman’s depiction of el-Qahira el-Gedida, a NUCA settlement established on the city’s eastern edge in 2000, describes this trend: “A mass of unfinished luxury gated communities, new foreign-language universities and multinational corporate offices, and industrial parks with many franchise operations for the re-assembly of goods produced elsewhere” (2009, 14).

Cairo’s gated compounds are constructed on the edge of the city, close enough to allow regular vehicular commute, but far enough that the ills of the city—pollution, noise, poverty—do not manifest. Exclusivity is maintained by walls, gates, checkpoints and guards. Inside is a self-contained microcosm of affluent life, often resembling a typical wealthy US suburb with no obvious town centre and dispersed residential roads that require a car to traverse. A compound may also house business parks, green spaces, gyms, golf courses, country clubs and so on. Entertainment and commercial complexes have also sprung up in the desert – high-end malls, hypermarkets, cinemas, dining plazas or hotels often conjoined into one self-contained ‘experience’, affordable only to a small proportion of Cairo’s population. For instance, the Nile City Towers on Cairo’s eastern riverbank features a Fairmont Hotel, cinema, mall, luxury apartments and offices for the World Bank, Mastercard and the Sawiris tycoons’ Orascom; the latter of whom funded the towers’ construction which was completed in 2004.

The elite spaces of desert settlements, gated compounds and luxury malls also generate a subjectivity as place of security and order; a narrative enhanced by a militarised state that governs on a mandate of emergency and fear of threat and crime (Simon, 2006). Whether located in the distant desert or not, these structurally diverse developments hold in common “a carefully controlled environment that is physically, economically and socially isolated from surrounding areas” (Adham, 2005, 25). For an inner-city development such as the Nile City Towers adjacent to several low-income neighbourhoods, class-based patterns of social behaviour in addition to physical measures preclude the encroachment of the suburban poor into their guarded interiors. The deliberate absence of the subaltern serves to conceptually ghettoise the communal city areas, associating the locale and those that frequent it with poverty and disorder. In particular, *‘ashwā’īyyāt* have come to be synonymous with crime and immorality in media representations and popular culture: lower-class slum inhabitants become the tragic fallen woman; the gangster, pimp or drug dealer villain; the Islamic militant state-enemy or the kind but naïve and incompetent neighbour (Mofeed & Elgendy, 2016).

The problematisation of *‘ashwā’īyyāt* can be considered in tandem with the securitisation of Downtown Cairo outlined in Chapter One. Both examples put forward notions of moralised urbanism and associated uncertainty and risk. Avoiding these areas liberates the citizen from the suspicion of a repressive state apparatus in their identity as a ‘decent’ law-abiding Egyptian by virtue of their abandonment of communal spaces and thus political profile. That this option is only viable to those Cairenes that can afford it is left unsaid. Accordingly, Mona Abaza notes that “the post-January [2011] urban reshaping of Cairo translates today into an unparalleled massive exodus of the well-to-do to the desert

cities, intensifying the process of ‘de-densification of the urban center’” (2016, 114). Closed compounds and luxury malls thus have a perverse democratising effect, in that they allow their users to figuratively transcend their geographic bounds of the punitive Egyptian experience without having to leave the country, simultaneously condemning those that cannot enter. These themes of security, order and privileged consumption thus engender a new way for upper-middle Cairenes to occupy space, represented by a specific brand of urbanism linked to performative practices of social positionality and a consumer economy. The production of elite space thus emerges from a nexus of fantasy, aspiration, security, identity and globalisation.

1. Cosmopolitanism and Post-Heritage Modalities

The desert developments of Cairo’s periphery demonstrate a geographically schizophrenic search for markers of meaning. It is possible to visit California via Sheikh Zayid’s Beverly Hills, Bel Air or Pasadena compounds, or London’s Hyde Park in New Cairo (the latter complete with its own Roman amphitheatre). The Ein Hills property developer’s website carries the tagline “L’ambiance de Monaco”, whilst their recent Tahrir Square billboards promised to “Assemble Beirut in Ein Hills” (Ein Hills, n.d.). Rhodes Real Estate Company is constructing a residential estate in the New Administrative Capital in the same distinctive layout as Dubai’s iconic Palm Islands (Youn7, 2018). Non-Arabic names are the norm for new districts and their well-travelled Anglophone residents, conjuring the aspirational and sublime—Utopia, Swan Lake, Paradise, Dreamland, Mirage City—or the continental flair of Villino, La Rose, El Patio, Allegria and Le Reve. Development rhetoric becomes formulaic: Dream Park fairground (in the Dreamland compound) was feted as “Orlando of the Middle East” (Adham, 2004), plans for Warraq and Dahab Islands speak of “Manhattan in Cairo” (El Rashidi, 2018) – an echo of Khedive ‘Ismail’s desire to recreate Cairo as ‘Paris on the Nile’. Evident too are processes of

‘glocalisation’: “globalisation as a process of hybridity in consumerism whereby a McDonald’s, a shopping mall or a consumer brand is recycled according to local tastes” (Abaza, 2001, 114). Architectural styles may reflect a reimagined or compound style between Islamic, oriental and modernist ‘Western’ forms, or markers of local meaning, such as the incorporation of *mashrabīyya* designs (carved wooden lattice window screens used in traditional Arabic architecture) at the Mall of Egypt or Pharaonic lotus flower motifs at City Stars Mall, where one can shop or sit and smoke shisha in air-conditioned surroundings.

The conclusion is clear: global connectivity is modernity, success and the desirable ideal. This is, however, a reductive, contradictory cosmopolitanism turned inwards, obtained through consumptive behaviour and performative consumption in enclavic spaces that become indexical of social positionality, rather than tangible experience, education, interaction or personal disposition that looks to the external world. Nowhere is this more clearly realised than in those desert developments that draw on Cairo itself for design inspiration. Consider again the previous chapter’s notion of nostalgic heritisation: a development agenda that plays on the perceived liberal golden age of Khedival Egypt. Taking glocalisation to its furthest conclusion, heritisation’s messy practicalities (the difficulty of acquiring and developing historic property in Downtown Cairo) can be dispensed with. By way of example, the city will soon be home to three Garden City neighbourhoods: the *belle époque* area adjacent to Downtown, and two modern compounds – Mena Garden City, constructed in Sixth of October in the 2000s, and a New Garden City, planned for the New Administrative Capital (Denis, 2006; Mukhtar, 2018). The original neighbourhood symbolised clean, secure and upmarket living, designed by private European developers in 1905 in emulation of British town planner Ebenezer Howard’s

garden city movement that emphasised green spaces and low-density housing for healthy living. It is characterised by its numerous international embassies, reputation for middle-class residents, and quiet, leafy streets, now somewhat degraded by city centre pollution and the security paraphernalia of tanks, check-points, blocked streets and blast walls given its proximity to Tahrir and occasional attacks on the US Embassy. The new-build Garden Cities promise the same European-style edifices and a local inflection of fine living without these inconveniences.

The recreation of old Cairene neighbourhoods in the desert do not purport to represent or salvage ‘genuine heritage’ as per the narratives of Al Ismaelia et al. in Downtown. Similarities between the original Garden City and its contemporary successors do not go beyond the surface – the name, green spaces, loosely referential architectural style and street layout, and a shared association with exclusive living. It can thus be considered as ‘post-heritage’ in its unabashed anachronism: it requires no extant city fabric to locate itself, and makes no claims to historical authenticity beyond drawing on nostalgic readings of a general *belle époque* Downtown milieu in order to market units. What remains is an essentialised aesthetic that not only dislocates itself from the bounds of history (as discussed with regards to heritisation) but also place. A second interpretation of Anaya Roy’s description of nostalgia as “a look back to the future” (2004, 65) is worth revisiting in this regard. Post-heritage development simultaneously celebrates Cairo (by deeming it worthy of emulation) whilst condemning the city as inaccessible unless via facsimile. The spaces of present-day Downtown (and those citizens that still frequent it) are historicised as irretrievable. Post-heritage development thus presents an answer for the future in the fatalistic physical, not just cognitive, abandonment of the present as something already lost.

2. Globalising Cities and the Dubai Effect

“Cities are assuming a powerful role [in the global economy], and as a result of such processes they are increasingly being viewed as a product that needs to be marketed.”

- Yasser Elsheshtawy, 2009, 237

Whilst older global cities such as London and New York were shaped to meet the needs of globalisation, aspiring newer municipalities must first affect the trappings of global success with the goal of attracting future flows of capital (De Koning, 2009). The city is thus designated as a product with demonstrable assets as emblematic of the global. Yasser Elsheshtawy describes this in detail:

“These marketing efforts involve attracting headquarters or regional branches of international companies and the staging of ‘mega events.’ Other projects include luxury housing, dining establishments, and entertainment amenities to attract the professional personnel required to operate these global activities. Urban projects, such as trade centers, conference centers, and hotels, provide a catalyst for further encouraging investment and tourism. Architecture in many instances is used to create eye catching impressions... Such projects are the means to revitalize an otherwise stagnant city...” (2009, 237)

This younger tier of global cities finds a regional paragon in East Asia and the Persian Gulf, coming to stand as “replicable models of an urban futurity that does not find its ultimate reference in the West” (Ong, 2012, 14). In the Middle East, the hypermodern settlements of Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Doha have become new capitals for transnational flows of industry, business and tourism, transformed over mere decades from tribal desert

communities to nation states with some of the world's highest GDPs per capita, boosted by the hydrocarbon boom of the 1970s and 1980s. Dubai in particular has come to represent an authentic Arab success story for the modern age, intimated by a cityscape of skyscrapers, luxury living and urban mega-projects. Jan Nederveen Pieterse summates this: "the Middle East is an outlier in contemporary globalisation, the Gulf is an outlier in the Middle East, and Dubai is an outlier in the Gulf" (2010, 15).

Dubai's strength is rooted in its ability to capitalise on its strategic location in the Persian Gulf near the Strait of Hormuz and its long outward-looking history of multiculturalism and trade, as exemplified by Dubai's ruler Sheikh Muhammad bin Rashid al-Makhtoum's 'central world' narrative. It has sought diversification beyond its oil reserves by investing in infrastructure, industry, high-tech innovation, leisure, human development, and higher education, alongside an emerging private sector (Nederveen Pieterse, 2010). The Jebel Ali port is the largest man-made harbour and ninth busiest port in the world, and Dubai International is the world's third busiest airport, consolidated by more than 30 free economic zones, advanced container shipping facilities, roads and communications networks. Dubai attracts millions of guest workers and expatriates from across the world each year, drawn by the region's economic possibilities. Its older regional counterparts of Damascus, Baghdad or Cairo appear mired in poverty, monolithic authoritarianism and sectarian conflict in comparison, unable to formulate a modern identity without recourse to civilizational heritage fantasias of antique glory (Elshehtawy, 2004). That the absolute monarchies of the UAE and other Gulf states are just as autocratic, that other regions of the Middle East lack the extensive oil reserves on which the Gulf's wealth is founded, that their hypermodernism hides a hinterland of marginalised foreign labour, and that each nation is formed by its own historical specificities (including that of

colonial subjugation) do not register within the framework of neoliberal normativity. The words of political commentator Thomas Friedman (2006) are illustrative in this regard:

“It [Dubai] is a bridge of decency that leads away from the failing civilization [of other Arab-Muslim countries]... Dubaians are building a future based on butter not guns, private property not caprice, services more than oil, and globally competitive companies, not terror networks. Dubai is about nurturing Arab dignity through success not suicide. As a result, its people want to embrace the future, not blow it up... Dubai is where we should want the Arab world to go.”

Ahmed Kanna (2011) describes this as a form of ‘reverse Orientalism’ which approves the evolution of the Emirati city as the correct Middle Eastern response to globalisation, as encapsulated by rapid economic growth and new-build infrastructure. In doing so, this constricts what it means to be modern and successful in the Arab world; updating Edward Said for the neoliberal present. By extension Dubai’s natives are the ‘right kind of Arabs’ practicing globalised capitalist entrepreneurialism palatable to Friedman et al.. The Arab city’s binary fate as immutably heritised or hypermodern thus works in the same way – born of hegemonic global development discourses that place cities beyond their own agency and contextualities of empire and capital.

Dubai’s global city narrative as an emulative model is thus reflected in the Cairene context, given the geographic proximity and socio-cultural ties between the Arab region. Dubai’s physicality can be imported in a direct sense: retail complexes such as Ma’adi City Centre and Cairo Festival City are replicas of their originals in Dubai, courtesy of UAE-based construction giant Al-Futtaim (Elsheshtawy, 2006; Bundhun, 2012). The ingress of

Gulf, particularly Emirati, capital is clear; Fredrick Deknatel (2012) notes that by 2012, “half of the twenty-six most valuable real estate developments in Egypt—those worth more than \$100 million—were fully owned by Gulf-based conglomerates. In fact, Gulf-based companies held 80 percent of the value of all real estate projects under development”. Indeed, the NUCA city of Sheikh Zayed is named for the UAE’s first president and father of the nation whose money funded the settlement in 1995; his 24-foot bronze statue watches over the desert road at the city’s gated entrance (Omar, 2016). In the Uptown Cairo gated housing development in Muqattam, its central Emaar Square is named for the Emirati company that constructed it in partnership with the EAF (Elshahed, 2014).

In a more general sense, a visual *précis* of success is found in emulation of Dubai’s hypermodern aesthetic of the superlative – high-rise statements of glass and chrome, sometimes glocalised with neo-Islamic designs; the world’s largest, tallest, only and best. Mona Abaza (2011) names this ‘Dubaisation’, a development aesthetic that visually simulates the Emirati city’s material and poetic registers of “neoliberal subjectivity as an urban utopia” (118), an openness to the global, and thus the salvational potential of millennial capitalism. Recognising these efforts as not merely an outcome of free market-borne global homogenisation, but as the “product of a very much a local hegemonic imagination” (Peterson, 2011, 17) elucidates the Egyptian case further. In Cairo, where globalising processes are ongoing, uncertain and relatively modest (alongside a slowly stabilising but weak national economy), viability is increasingly elided for visuality within governmental development discourses predicated in wilful empiricism. Dubai’s success story is interpreted only at the superficial: the infrastructure, economic diversification and capture of human capital that informed the emirate’s development is missing, despite Egypt’s potential to capitalise on its strategic locational assets in the Suez Canal and

Alexandria's access to the Mediterranean. Marketing the 'city product' is reduced only to the visual hollow. If it looks like a global city, it will be a global city, regardless of local contingencies, needs or cost of construction, or material utility. "If you build it, they will come" becomes a development logic writ large – echoed in the words of a NUCA official from 1990: "We have to complete our plans. We cannot look to see if people come or not. They will come" (quoted in Sims, 2015, 126). This disposition forms the basis on which recent state-led urban development plans for the city have been articulated.

D. Cairene Fever Dreams: Planning Vision Logics

There are many things that can be said about planning in Egypt. Transparent is not one of them... Figuring out how urban plans are being designed and implemented in any given area of Egypt's capital, Cairo, usually involves searching for random pieces of information from various sources that almost always leads to a muddled and self-contradictory picture.

- TADAMUN, 2014b

In summer 2008, without public announcement, a new masterplan for the Greater Cairo Region began to circulate around state-sponsored conferences, presented to audiences of potential international investors, particularly from the Gulf region. Entitled Cairo 2050, the plan was formulated by the GOPP with Gamal Mubarak as figurehead and coordination from the World Bank, United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN-Habitat), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ)⁷ and JICA. The central precepts of "redistribution and

⁷ GTZ is a former German governmental development agency. As of January 1, 2011, GTZ was merged with two other German international development organisations: the Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst (DED) and the Internationale Weiterbildung und Entwicklung (InWEnt) to form the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ) as it is known today.

decentralization" run throughout: Cairo is overcrowded, its population is growing, ergo, urban expansion east and west into the desert is the solution.

In this respect, Cairo 2050 is no different from every other urban development vision for Cairo since the 1970s and the foundation of NUCA – tackling population density through land reclamation and resettlement. What is added is the new rhetoric of ‘global city status’ articulated through ambitious urban plans and mega-projects for Dubai-inspired glass towers, green spaces and high-end retail, business and residential zones with little regard to the extant city fabric. This includes a new metro line to the city’s northwest, a new central business district in the densely populated Maspero Triangle area, ‘*ashwā’īyyāt*’ clearance across the city, and the development of architectural heritage areas as “open-air museums” including the neo-pharaonic Khufu Avenue, an ambitious 12-kilometre boulevard of fountains and trees (“the world’s largest and longest cultural axis”, GOPP, 2008, 84) stretching from Sphinx Square in Muhandiseen to a grand plaza in front of the Pyramids of Giza.

Once released to the public, Cairo 2050 was widely criticised by opposition politicians, academics, civil society, urban planners, media and the international community (Sims, 2015; TADAMUN, 2014a). The attachment of high-profile global agencies with public commitments to human rights and social justice agendas did not translate into Cairo 2050’s planning logics. The vision appears as fantasy, orientated solely to attract mass foreign investment and public-private partnerships yet lacking any comprehensive implementation strategy; notably no evidence of public consultation for the mass evictions of the ‘*ashwā’īyyāt*’ it would require to be realised. The proposal document itself borders on nonsensical – 200-pages of sparse, poorly formatted buzzword recommendations: “Better

governance, improve the environment, increase green areas” (GOPP, 2008, 38), or “Raise quality of life standards, achieve social equity between different segments of society” (Ibid., 4). Most pages are vague graphics; hazy aerial maps of Cairo with superimposed coloured boxes and impossible-to-read blurred labels. An English-language version is littered with spelling and grammar mistakes.⁸ A ‘World Cities’ section places the Egyptian plan beside Paris 2020, Abu Dhabi 2030, Shanghai 2050 and others with clear implication: a global paradigm for local problems.

The three years between Cairo 2050’s inception and Mubarak’s deposal saw expansion in Sixth of October and el-Qahira el-Gedida NUCA settlements but little else (Flahive, 2017). Revolution and regime change in 2011 suspended all major government projects. In June 2012 Muhammad Morsi was elected, promising the wholesale reformulation of Egypt and its society under the rubric of the Freedom and Justice Party’s Nahda Project (‘Renaissance’ Project). The Nahda Project’s urban components were named ‘Egypt 2052’—“the revolution added two years on” is the glib explanation—and drafted again by GOPP, who appeared to lift the new plan almost verbatim from its predecessor promising a reformulated strategy, but displaying the same policies of radical population redistribution into the Nile Valley and development predicated on foreign private investment in upscale projects (Bakri, 2013; Deknatel, 2012).

Following further regime change after the 2013 coup d’état, the capital and other parts of the country have entered a new phase of urban development, with a large number of projects announced or set in motion in recent years. With political control now re-

⁸ The GOPP removed the Cairo 2050 document from its website. The only remaining publicly available version is an English-language translation hosted on the Cairo From Below blog, see references.

entrenched under President Abd al-Fatah al-Sisi the political capacity to push plans forwards has increased since the political uncertainty of the post-2011 period. Grouping the government's vision for the capital under one cohesive strategy is difficult, however. In 2014⁹ a joint-cooperative report from the GOPP, UN-Habitat and UNDP was released, entitled Greater Cairo Urban Development Strategy (GCUDS): Part I: Future Vision and Strategic Directions. The report is in English and only available via the UN-Habitat website. Neither an Arabic version, nor Part II, appear to have been published. TADAMUN (2014c) reports that the GOPP has referred to GCUDS as both the Strategic Vision (*al-ru'yya al-'istrātījīyya*) and the Strategic Plan (*al-mukhaṭṭaṭ al-'istrātījī*) for the Development of the Greater Cairo Region (*litaṭwīr minṭaqat al-qāhira al-kubrā*), and interchangeably uses two different terms for 'Development' in the plan's title (*taṭwīr* and *tanmīyya*)¹⁰. Media reports intermittently add 'Urban' (*al-'umrānī*) to the title (Abdulhafiz, 2014). The GOPP website itself names a Strategic Plan for Greater Cairo (*al-mukhaṭṭaṭ al-'istrātījī lil-qāhira al-kubrā*) with no inclusion of a comprehensive planning document or reference to the UN-Habitat-hosted GCUDS report, instead linking to a small number of standalone reports or brief articles on specific projects in the capital. The most recent plan listed is the 2013¹¹ Participatory Plan for the Strategic Plan for Greater Cairo Project (*khiṭṭat al-mushārīka limashrū'a al-mukhaṭṭaṭ al-'istrātījī lil-qāhira al-kubrā*), and the most recent project is a short paragraph on the Urban Infrastructure for Greater Cairo Project published in 2015 (GOPP, n.d.). For more recent information, media articles and corporate press releases must be relied on. The oscillation between 'plan', 'vision' and

⁹ The document was released in 2014 but bears the date 2012. This appears to be a mistake on the part of UN-Habitat.

¹⁰ *Taṭwīr* and *tanmīyya* both translate to the English term 'development', but the former encapsulates a more general idea of 'progression'.

¹¹ The document bears the date 2013 but appears to have been uploaded in 2015. Again, this highlights the lack of transparency and coherency typical of government planning in Egypt.

‘strategy’ conveys the uneven and incoherent nature of urban development in Cairo, where citizens are unable to obtain accurate information regarding the future of their own homes.

In short, a definitive development strategy is impossible to discern from public resources. Indeed, the hollow, brittle quality of ‘Dubaisation’ does not require it – it trades on visuality to reify success. As such, although practical information may be scant, digitally-rendered images and videos of yet-to-be-built Cairene neighbourhoods are readily available, the ubiquitous accompaniment to investment conferences, state press releases, architectural web-portfolios and real estate adverts. These computerised creations depict futuristic cityscapes, liberated from the requirement to answer for themselves – where will the money come from to fund these projects? How many citizens will be displaced in the construction of this hotel? Would a high-end shopping plaza see a socio-economically diverse clientele congregate as shown by this picture?¹² In purporting to depict the future city via graphically-designed ideals, the contested and problematic nature of the current urban reality that reflects political failure is erased. This act of representation abstracts the government from its own rule and decision-making within the city. These images are thus not only a product of the regime, but also allows the regime to reproduce its own authority, ruling through a politics of pixels that obscures as much as it reveals.

¹² I refer here specifically to the designs of British architectural firm Foster + Partners for the Maspero Triangle development that depict a high-end central business district of boulevards and roof gardens in an elegant neo-Islamic style thronged with stylish, modern, affluent young people as well as gallabiyya-wearing bread-sellers, typical of lower-class vendors. Contrary to what the picture shows, the latter is a form of informal economy usually prohibited in upscale developments, either by law or with business owners and private security discouraging nearby loitering or barring entry to those considered to be from the wrong social class. Foster + Partners were awarded the Maspero contract in 2015, but no longer appear to be attached to the project.

Back in the corporeal world, material changes unfolding on the ground indicate that “despite the revolution and different administrations, Cairo urban planning continues to be guided largely by priorities and logics first articulated during the Mubarak years” (Flahive, 2017). The same projects and policies endure under President Sisi, namely clearance of *‘ashwā’īyyāt*, developing ‘heritage’ areas in historical quarters and desert expansion in specific areas, including the highly controversial Khufu Avenue and Maspero Triangle developments that require the resettlement of millions of citizens. Global city discourses persist as the yardstick of success: GCUDS measures the capital’s ambitions through the Global City Index, where Greater Cairo must adopt “ambitious development plans to protect its position as a leader in the Middle East and North Africa Region and its status among the countries of the world” (GOPP et al., 2012/2014, 14), particularly in relation to that of “its regional competitor, the City of Dubai” (Ibid.). Statement architecture emphasises this, such as the Zaha Hadid-designed Nile Tower project adjacent to Maspero, feted to be the tallest building in Africa upon completion, under construction since 2008 (Sulayman, 2018). Personnel also remain, notably Mustafa Madbouli, former head of the GOPP and prime mover behind Cairo 2050 under Mubarak, now serving as both Prime Minister and Minister of Housing, Utilities and Urban Communities under President Sisi. This is the first time that these two posts have converged, demonstrating the centrality of urban development to the current administration and the political will to push decisions through governmental bureaucracy.

Regarding *‘ashwā’īyyāt* clearance, the social commitment displayed in initiatives such as 2014’s SHP have not materialised in a meaningful way under current urban development strategy. Similar social pledges have been made in recent years – in May 2016 Sisi announced that residents of 351 unsafe *‘ashwā’ī* areas across the country (the majority

found within the capital) would be moved to new public apartment complexes over the next three years, and in December 2018 declared Egypt would be ‘slum-free’ by the end of 2019 (Mourad, 2016; Hassan, 2018). In coordination with NUCA and the military, the Informal Settlements Development Fund (ISDF, *ṣandūq taṭwīr al-manāṭiq al-‘ashwā’īya*) established in 2009 has assisted these projects, mapping informal areas according to severity of need and coordinating rehoming policies. Residents of targeted areas are given the option between financial compensation, the opportunity to purchase new apartments rebuilt by the private sector in their original neighbourhoods, or relocation to purpose-built public housing districts (Ezz, 2018). This poses a fallacy of choice – compensation is too little, purchasing new apartments too expensive and resettlement brings similar issues faced by failed low-income housing projects in NUCA’s satellite cities. The Asmarat complex near Muqattam constructed by the EAAF using Tahya Masr funds is a prominent example: around 10,000 families have relocated there since its construction in 2016 but many criticise its isolation from city transport links, affordable commercial areas, lack of social cohesion and high apartment rents – residents who protested the latter in April 2018 have been evicted or jailed (Mohie, 2018). Despite the rhetoric of public welfare, ISDF interventions and classifications appear based on land value and investors’ preferences for future development, rather than pressing civil needs.

Extensive claims to transparency and participatory planning processes as purported by GCUDS in response to Cairo 2050’s detractors are also easily repudiated by lack of public engagement displayed in almost all cases of recent government development in populated areas (Abu Emaira, 2019; TADAMUN, 2014c; TADAMUN, 2014a). Informal areas across the city—Maspero, Ramlet al-Bulaq, Nazlet al-Semman, Manshiet Nasser, Matariyya, Duweiqa, Warraq and Dahab Islands and beyond—witness the same cyclical

dispossession. Military or state security forces on behalf of ISDF or NUCA attempt to evict residents, demolish buildings or confiscate land on uncertain legal grounds with insufficient consultation and inadequate alternatives, provoking community outrage that is met with legal stone-walling, or arrests, military trials, fines and prison sentences for those that resist. In July 2017 a resident was killed by state security forces whilst protesting the unannounced attempted destruction of homes on Warraq Island by EAAF, north of Zamalek (Afifi, 2017). Islanders await the result of their lawsuit against a June 2018 decree that authorised NUCA to establish a “new urban community” rumoured to include “seven-star hotels” on the land that houses 90,000 Cairenes (Mada Masr, 2019). Government reactions to citizen-led resistance in other parts of the city does not bode well for Warraq’s fate: in the first half of 2018 bulldozers razed the homes of 18,000 Maspero Triangle residents after decades of dispute over the valuable Nile-adjacent land between the Egyptian government, foreign landowners and the residents of its largely informal dwellings. Despite the exhortations of GOPP, GCUDS et al., the government’s lack of regard for citizen consultation is clearly demonstrated by this case. A two-year grassroots participatory study coordinated by independent architectural consultants Madd Platform and the Minister of Urban Renewal and Informal Settlements Dr Leila Iskandar produced a government-approved Terms of Reference for contractors that accommodated the interests of commercial developers and residents without the need for mass evictions (Madd, 2015). A snap presidential directive and cabinet reshuffle in late 2015 disbanded the ministry¹³, removed the socially-minded Iskandar from her post, terminated Madd’s involvement in the area and awarded carte blanche to its international contractors to

¹³ The Ministry of Urban Renewal and Informal Settlements was newly created in June 2014, signalling a new welfare-orientated governmental approach to housing rights by elevating *‘ashwā’īyyat* development to a top-level government priority. In operation for only 14 months, the ministry was absorbed into the current Ministry of Housing, headed by Prime Minister Mustafa Madbouli, and the ISDF.

develop the land without the possibility of return for its inhabitants (Ezz, 2018). Maspero as a new central business district will host the usual skyscrapers and high-end tourist facilities, situated on a two-kilometre Nile-side stretch already home to 11 luxury hotels that average around a 35-percent occupancy rate. Alongside the questionable economic propriety and lack of regard for basic citizen needs, presumably the triangle's overhaul will also expunge the memory of the October 2011 Maspero massacre, where 28 Coptic protestors were killed by army and security forces during a peaceful protest against the destruction of a church in Upper Egypt.

E. The New Administrative Capital

“Cairo isn't suitable for the Egyptian people. There are traffic jams on every street, the infrastructure can't support the population, and it's very crowded. Without any specific masterplan, it has started to become ugly... there's no humanity.”

- Brigadier-General Khaled El-Husseiny Soliman, spokesperson for Administrative Capital for Urban Development, interview with *The Guardian* (Michaelson, 2018)

By 2022 Egypt hopes to join a group of more than 30 nation-states who have relocated their political seat of power to new-build capital cities, including Brazil, Nigeria, Myanmar, Australia and Kazakhstan. The possibility of a new national capital was first mentioned in a press conference held by Mustafa Madbouli in July 2014. The project's official announcement, however, was not until the March 2015 Egypt Economic Development Conference in Sharm el-Sheikh aimed at rejuvenating international investment after the post-2011 exodus of foreign capital. At the initial projected cost of 45 billion USD, the new capital currently under construction 45-kilometres east of the existing metropolis is the centrepiece of the Sisi government's development vision. Although finding precedence

in decades of NUCA desert reclamation, the magnitude of the capital city project represents an unprecedented venture in modern Egyptian history which goes beyond the redevelopment of inner-city Cairo described above. Following mega-project principles, its size and scope are ‘trait-making’ rather than ‘trait-taking’ (Flyvbjerg, 2014, 3) – imposing a new ambitious structure and reality on society, rather than conventional planning to modify existing urban fabric, as is consistent with contemporary Egyptian state planning logics. The lure of the capital city mega-project is clear: for an aspirant metropolis that lacks the historical contextuality that has produced global city status, this proposes a shortcut to success. The inhospitable desert landscape enhances this further, underscoring a comparison to the Gulf in the process: man conquers nature in an indelible feat of ingenuity, power and prestige.

The regime gives two primary justifications for the construction of a new capital city. First, as a solution to Cairo’s rapidly expanding population a new metropolis theoretically alleviates strain from the extant city by relocating citizens and workplaces. Second, the new capital articulates the Sisi administration’s ambitions for global city status; a powerhouse fit for modern government, business and the good life. The generative properties of its Dubai-inspired visual globality is evident: Mustafa Madbouli declared that “Egypt will enter the age of skyscrapers and high-rise towers” (Mukhtar, 2018) in a recent visit to the capital’s construction site. Project chairman Major General Ahmed Zaki Abdin has stated: "Those who go shopping in Cyprus, Greece or Dubai must come to us. All of Dubai is based on these malls, and this is what we are planning in the administrative capital. The experience of Dubai is pioneering and it has established for big place for itself in the global market" (Sout al-Omma, 2018). Indeed, a run-down of the New Administrative Capital’s credentials is an exercise in superlative pageantry, as outlined in Table 1 (Ministry

of Housing, Utilities and Urban Communities [MHUUC], n.d., Rios, 2015; Mada Masr, 2016; Reuters, 2019).

Table 1: Proposed Projects and Credentials of the New Administrative Capital

Projects and Credentials	Details
700 km ² total area of proposed city	Roughly the same size as Singapore.
1.1 million residential units	Divided into 21 housing districts.
5 million target residential population	Developed with a view to increasing this number to 6.5 million in the future.
1.75 million permanent jobs	Including an initial 50,000 relocated government employees, to be increased to 100,000 after 3 years.
5.6 km ² Central Business District	Includes 20 skyscrapers and Africa's tallest tower. ¹⁴
91 km ² energy farms	Includes solar and wind power fields.
16 km ² international airport	Four times larger than London Heathrow.
4 km ² theme park	Seven times larger than California's Disneyland.
34 embassies	Embassies have already been approached regarding relocation from Cairo but have yet been reluctant to publicly commit to the move.
1,250 religious buildings	Includes the Nativity of Christ Cathedral, the Middle East's largest church and tallest steeple, and the 8,000-capacity al-Fattah al-'Alim Mosque, both inaugurated by President Sisi in January 2019.
35 km Green River	A waterway mimicking the Nile to run through the middle of the city. It will be the longest man-made river in the world. The surrounding parkland will be double the size of New York's Central Park.
New opera house	Upon completion will be the largest in the Middle East and Africa. Replaces existing opera house in Zamalek.
New presidential palace and government ministries	Relocated from Downtown and other areas of extant Cairo.

Other amenities include 40,000 hotel rooms, a 5,000-seat conference centre, 2,000 schools and colleges, 600 medical facilities, and contested reports on plans for a replica of

¹⁴ It is unclear where Zaha Hadid's Nile Tower near Maspero in Cairo—also slated to be Africa's tallest tower—would stand in relation to the tallest tower proposed for the New Administrative Capital.

the Eiffel Tower, an obelisk to resemble the Washington Monument, and a new military headquarters named ‘the Octagon’ (Mada Masr, 2016; Amar, 2018).

1. Constructing the Capital: Who and How?

The New Administrative Capital—alongside the Suez Canal and Toshka megaprojects—demonstrates the centrality of the military in Egyptian political and economic affairs. The project is overseen by the Administrative Capital for Urban Development (ACUD, *al-‘āṣima al-‘idārīyya lil-tanmīyya al-‘umrānīyya*), jointly established by NUCA under the MHUUC and the EAF, with a 51-percent ownership majority by the latter (Magdy, 2018). Its chairman is Lieutenant General Ahmed Zaki Abdin, who has also served as the Minister for Defence and Military Production since June 2018. ACUD will also take over the vacant premises of those government offices that are relocating to the new capital, generating further development opportunities on prime Downtown real estate, likely to join central Cairo’s growing surplus of half-empty luxury hotels as indicated by the agency (Michaelson, 2018).

Of course, the EAF also owns the land that the city is being constructed upon. Of the 490 km² available for private development, plots will be leased rather than sold, retaining the military’s ultimate control over the area (Lindsey, 2017). Military agencies have been awarded significant tenders for the project (Elshahed, 2014), notably the EAAF: one of a small number of military agencies used by the armed forces to conduct economic activities through, with a focus on construction, infrastructure engineering and town planning. The EAAF’s urban development capacities have allowed it to increasingly come to function as a huge parastatal contractor for government projects (Attalah & Hamama, 2016; Abul-

Magd, 2017). The military's profile is further raised by their negotiations and partnerships with foreign investors that constitute the backbone of the new capital's funding plan.

Despite the military's self-promotion as the singular bastion of national competence, both the capital city mega-project's construction timeline and cost projection have since bypassed. Completion of the first building phase has been pushed back to June 2019 and the initial budget of 45 billion USD scrapped for a 'case-by-case basis' – "There is no total budget" says ACUD spokesperson General Khaled El-Husseiny (Michaelson, 2018). Financial uncertainty is compounded by the recent difficulties the project has encountered regarding funding, reflecting a broader nation-wide trend that sees Egypt struggling to attract major foreign investments outside of the oil and gas industries, with FDI falling by 200 million USD in the fiscal year ending June 2018; its lowest point since adopting the IMF austerity plan in 2016. Egypt's external debt also rose by 17.2-percent to USD 92.6 billion in the same time period (Magdy, 2018; Werr, 2018). ACUD was founded with a cash injection of 204 billion EGP (11.8 billion USD) from the Ministry of Defence and MHUUC, but is projected to continue without further government assistance (Michaelson, 2018).

Initially, investment for the mega-project was to be coordinated through the Abu Dhabi-based Capital City Partners (CCP) company, a private fund of global investors largely from the Gulf established by prominent Emirati businessman and political advisor to the governor of Dubai Mohamed Alabbar. Alabbar is the founder of Emaar Properties, one of the largest construction contractors in the world, notable for its Burj Khalifa and Dubai Mall prestige projects. CCP was to be responsible for developing the bulk of the city's infrastructure and housing, including electricity stations and gas pipelines. Negotiations

between ACUD and the Emirati company later broke down and CCP withdrew from their contract, citing financial disputes and lack of progress. This came as Egypt began efforts to internationalise its investment portfolio away from overreliance on Gulf, particularly Saudi Arabian, capital, given the unwanted political interference and expectations often attached (Amar, 2018). China's drive to provide FDI as part of its world-building Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) provided an alternative: UN-Habitat named Cairo the fifth top destination for Chinese FDI to African cities in 2017 (He & Zhu, 2018). The EAF has been able to flex and diversify its foreign clientele, forming a new partnership later in 2015 with the China State Construction Engineering Corporation (CSCEC), China's largest construction and real estate conglomerate, followed by a second major deal in 2016 with China Fortune Land Development Company (CFLD). In February 2017 CSCEC pulled out of a 3 billion USD contract to build government premises, again citing disagreements on land prices and revenue shares. CFLD ended their 20 billion USD deal in December 2018 on the same grounds, followed by the exit of Emaar from a smaller project in January 2019. As of April 2019 CSCEC remains involved in the development of the administrative capital's central business district, and a 739 million USD loan from China Exim Bank is to finance a electric train line linking the new city to the outskirts of Cairo, as well as other construction projects across the country, but major work on the new capital so far has been largely limited to domestic entities – EAAF, MHUUC and Egyptian firms such as the Sawirises' Orascom, the Talaat Mustafa Group, the Arab Contractors and others (Mukhtar, 2018; Global Construction Review, 2017; Global Construction Review, 2019; Magdy, 2018). Government statements shift accordingly: ACUD's Board of Directors Chairman Ayman Ismail who exhorted the centrality of the new capital's foreign investment model (Oxford Business Group, 2017), also rejoices that "these huge real estate projects that are considered to be the future of Egypt, will only be built by the hands of Egyptians [*bi-*

sawā'id 'ibnā'ihā, ‘by the arms of [the nation’s] sons’]” (quoted in Abu Jabal, 2017). That the majority of Egyptians will not be able to access the new capital’s utopic suburbia is left unsaid, its construction workers and conscripted *corvée* labourers disappearing from the site when construction is finally completed.

In this regard, the New Administrative Capital does not appear set to deviate from its NUCA predecessors in terms of social provision. Despite boasting schemes for affordable residential areas, houses appear to be priced well above average Egyptian incomes. Even with a 25-percent discount offered to government employees, the average property cost of 8000 to 9000 EGP (462 to 520 USD) per square metre as quoted by El-Husseiny outstrips the mean public sector monthly wage estimated at 1860 EGP (107 USD) by government statistics in 2016 (Egyptian Center for Economic Studies, 2018; Michaelson, 2018). Most government workers do not own cars, meaning that accessing their new workplace will be challenging. The fare tariffs, commute time and efficiency of the future Chinese-built railway is not yet clear; changes to Cairo’s inner-city metro—its fares pegged at a flat rate of 1 EGP for many years were recently raised to 3 to 7 EGP scale to much public outrage—do not indicate that social inclusion and equitable usability is a top transport priority. The purported relocation of government personnel also undermines the state’s justification of de-densifying Downtown Cairo: if these workers do not own cars, then closing government offices is likely to have little impact on the congested roads of the city centre. Cynics suggest that this is the point: a swollen bureaucracy means state pension pay-outs will soon cripple government coffers: resignation or early retirement for lower-middle classes government employees who cannot afford to travel to their new place of work would negate the need to maintain costly social welfare programmes.

The disillusionment of certain Gulf and Chinese companies with the New Administrative Capital raises further pessimistic questions around the project's ultimate viability and worth. Regarding China, empowering FDI initiatives has been a cornerstone of the Communist Party of China's economic growth and development policy since their Tenth Five-Year Plan began in 2001 (He & Zhu, 2018). This disposition is reinforced by Xi Jinping's 2013 substantial commitment to the BRI as a means of integrating the Chinese economy with the global and fortifying mutually beneficial bilateral cooperation through financing major infrastructure routes and productive investments across Asia, Europe and Africa (Yunling, 2015). Despite sizeable Chinese FDI in other parts of the country, Beijing's ambitions that look to the *longue durée* and the CSCEC and CFLD's recent reticence to continue their partnerships with the New Administrative Capital do not place the project's viability in a positive light.

Reflections on President Sisi's other megaprojects raise further doubts around the current governmental capacity for practical planning and management and the new capital's future. Despite an outwardly more pragmatic development vision, the necessity of the Suez Canal Corridor Project is dubious; a second lane cuts transit time by only a few hours, and global shipping has not recovered since the 2008 financial crisis. After its completion in 2014—inaugurated by Sisi sailing through the waterway on a boat once owned by King Farouq—the 8 million USD venture has not recuperated its cost. It is yet to near its 13.4 billion USD annual revenue projection, declining year-on-year from its 2014 productivity of 5.5 billion USD and further exacerbating Egypt's mounting public debt (Mandour, 2018; Hassan, 2017).

2. Political Security and Revolution

“It's hard to imagine Egypt's revolution taking place in a gleaming, far-flung city of the future eagerly dreamt of by government bureaucrats and business elites. The uprising was shaped and aided by historic Cairo's contours: the densely populated neighbourhoods along which marching protesters, yelling "Come on down!" could pick up thousands more; the short distances within the city core; the central, intuitive meeting point of Tahrir Square.”

- Ursula Lindsey, 2017

Utopian security logics are clearly expressed by the administrative capital's status as the new seat of government and militarised political power. The movement of government agencies out of Cairo's crowded centre is not a new idea. Nasser proposed that the 1958 newly-built Nasr City suburb would become the new governmental quarter, as did Sadat with Sadat City in 1978; both plans failed due to lack of political will or threats of strikes from public sector employees against relocation. The idea resurfaced in Mubarak's Cairo 2050, calling for the “...relocation of ministries and public institutions outside the core of the city” (GOPP, 2008, 36). A *muraba' al-wizārāt* ('Ministerial Square') was proposed for Masr el-Gedida near the Qatamiyya Heights gated housing development was not developed further. Conversely, the Sisi administration has demonstrated the clear political will to refocus policy around regime security and self-preservation.

The legacy of 2011 cannot be ignored in this regard. As Hazem Kandil notes, “while officially praising the 2011 revolt, their [Sisi' government's] overriding aim was to prevent its repetition” (2016a, 346). During the January 25 Revolution and following years a number of government buildings in Tahrir Square and its surrounding streets became targets of revolutionary outrage due to their association with repressive regime security apparatus (Flahive, 2018). The NDP headquarters behind the Tahrir Egyptian Museum

were set alight by protestors in January 2011, its ruins later demolished in 2015. In 2016 the Ministry of the Interior relocated to the al-Tagammu‘ al-Khamis district of Masr el-Gedida, some 25km away from its original location in Sheikh Riham Street where it faced repeated attacks by protestors. The Police Academy, Office of the Prosecutor-General, State Lawsuits Authority and other state security offices also moved in the same year (Eltohamy, 2016). Only then were some of Downtown’s security measures—walls, razor wire, police presence—relaxed. This builds upon the move of the American University in Cairo’s (AUC) Tahrir departments to a purpose-built campus in the Masr el-Gedida desert in 2008. As one of the premier institutes of higher education in Africa and the Middle East, AUC’s relocation effectively works to remove the kind of articulate pro-democracy voices of 2011’s revolutionary youth from sites of visibility.

Although Downtown’s overcrowding is often cited as a justification for relocation, in a 2016 interview with *Al-Monitor*, the head of the Police Academy General Ahmad al-Badri stated that the transfer of government buildings out of Downtown was specifically informed by security concerns. He states that due to “the targeting of these institutions by a number of protestors concentrated in Downtown that strive to spread chaos throughout the country, particularly after these demonstrations reached an unfortunate level of chaos themselves. They also strive to break the status of the ministries and a number of other state institutions by besieging them and distorting their walls with graffiti of vulgar drawings and bad language aimed at those who work there” (Eltohamy, 2016). The removal of government structures thus effectively severs the physical and ideological link of Tahrir as a space of popular protest. The symbolic currency of Downtown as a representation of regime power is eroded, negating it as a target of public dissent when those targets no longer exist, transformed into Hiltons, Four Seasons and Steigenbergers under ACUD’s direction. Once

relocated to Cairo's wealthy peripheral suburbs and later to the new capital, their distance from the heart of the city affords a measure of discretion from the public eye and open space that function as a contested communal realm. The future inhabitants of the New Administrative Capital will become a *de facto* first-line of defence for the state – wealthy elites that suffer the least from Egypt's ills of unemployment, poor housing or social immobility, thus less predisposed to anti-government action. A double barrier both material and social is thus constructed for the longevity of the regime. This is more critical now than ever before – the military stands as the state and the state stands as the military to a degree unprecedented in recent years. A new outbreak of revolution means that, unlike 2011, the EAF itself as an institution is at stake.

3. Connected, Green and Global in the *Madīna Zhakīyya*

Promotional material and press statements abound with descriptions of the New Administrative Capital as “smart, connected, green and sustainable” (MHUUC, n.d.). Solar and wind power farms will provide sustainable energy sources and water and organic waste will be recycled. The city's urban fabric is to be constructed as a data platform where embedded sensors can monitor and respond to changes in energy usage and traffic flows as they take place in real-time. This stands in contrast to Cairo where severe levels of air and noise pollution, congested streets, few green spaces, water wastage and inadequate refuse disposal services rank the city amongst the poorest in the world for public and ecological health. Addressing environmental concerns is thus a paramount concern. Eric Denis (2006) describes how growing global awareness of environmental concerns since the 1970s has been translated into an idiom of socially-minded control in the Egyptian context in recent decades. He states:

“This kind of ecology [as pursued by the Egyptian state] favors the enlistment of the technocratic edifice and the authoritarian state apparatus. It offers to the state a new savant discourse and instruments of scientific domination. Cairo ecologism favors the construction of threats and constraints legitimating the maintenance of an authoritarian regime and of an exclusivist mode of redistribution... Ecology also reveals itself to be an ideal tool for showcasing the transfer of competences that characterize liberalization. From the regime’s point of view, ‘good’ environment is based on an alliance with businesspeople who know the issues at stake, whereas the people, completely incompetent, can only be polluters.” (66)

What Denis describes can be considered a form of techno-politics. Gabrielle Hecht (2011, 3) defines this as the “strategic practice of designing or using technology to constitute, embody, or enact political goals”. Timothy Mitchell (2002, 43) expands on this, describing a “certain way of organizing the amalgam of human and nonhuman, things and ideas, so that the human, the intellectual, the realm of intentions and ideas seems to come first and to control and organize the nonhuman”. With the state as an arbiter of what constitutes environmentally sound practice, ecological discourse is leveraged in favour of government interests – bypassing industrial pollution that generates economic revenue, and towards providing justification for clearing slums deemed unsanitary to sell land for development, for example. Ecology is thus weaponised as a method of spatial and population control. An elite-defined, irrefutable natural ‘need’ subsumes not only the human concerns of the general populous, but their humanity itself defined as destructive and ignorant, set against the paternalism of the state with its visionary foresight for the greater good. This can be seen as correspondent to Paul Amar’s (2013) characterisation of the human-security state as exemplified in contemporary Egypt. Discourses of human

rights and national security interests converge in a contradictory and uneven way, resulting in paradoxical power expressions where superficially progressive discourse on civil liberties (a narrative easily picked up and translated to Global North and UN rhetoric of humanitarian values) is superimposed over a coercive repression of sexual, class and gender identities. In this case, environmental concerns for public health in the face of Cairo's chronic pollution and overcrowding that resonate with global environmental governance rhetoric intersects with a logic of profit generation that elides the social contract whilst self-presenting as in the interests of the people.

The slick rhetoric of smart urbanism enhances this, updating Denis' techno-political analysis for the age of the networked society. As defined by the International Telecommunication Union, a smart city is "an innovative city that uses ICTs [information and communication technologies] and other means to improve quality of life, efficiency of urban operation and services and competitiveness" (quoted in Adjar, 2018). The New Administrative Capital's as Egypt's first 'smart city' (*'madīna zhakīyya'*) captures a current zeitgeist in urban planning and governance practices that utilises digital surveillance and big data algorithms to address the chaotic and complex realities of city living. Promulgated by global technology, engineering and consulting companies such as Google, IBM, Tencent and Huawei, smart urbanism's techno-utopianism re-appropriates the cityscape as a part of the growing hardware of the Internet of Things, able to monitor household energy output for excessive usage, direct drivers to free parking spaces as they open, or send extra vehicles to crowded bus stops. Cities such as San Francisco, Toronto, London and Barcelona lead new models of retrofitting 'smart city creativity' into their urban fabric, or networked environments are built from scratch in the UAE's Masdar City and South Korea's Songdo. Respective government pledges for 500 smart city pilots in China and 100 in India reflect

an increasingly normative vision of growth and modernity where innovations in digital technology stand as the primary driver for success.

This holds particular relevance in the African context where many countries seek economic development: technology-driven solutions can leapfrog a lack of extant infrastructure and attracting FDI is considered crucial to stimulate moribund economies. The continent has been labelled as the world's "last property development frontier" (Watson, 2015, 36) with its rapid urbanisation and youthful population growth – by 2030 six of the world's 41 megacities will be in Africa; Cairo is already amongst that number (Adjar, 2018). Vanessa Watson notes how the utopian new-build cities that swept the Indian subcontinent some five to ten years ago are rapidly appearing in Africa, backed by European, North American and Chinese investment capital and technologies. Many of these are marketed as 'eco', 'global' and 'smart' cities, such as Lagos' Eko Atlantic City, Nairobi's Konza Technology City, or the retrofitted smart urbanity of Kigali. Yet, as with Dubaisation's aspirational posture, "the form and aesthetics of the built environment are what really count" (Watson, 2015, 37) rather than the operational and functional details of smart urbanism – Adam Greenfield (2016) notes how the phenomenon of Chinese 'ghost cities' is being replicated as some of Africa's newest techno-cities lie empty and half-built. He continues:

"Each [new 'smart' settlement in Africa] represents an effort to gussy up the raw economics of land development with the comforting, familiar tropes of the knowledge economy. Each is dashed with the most superficial gloss of technological contemporaneity, right down to the inevitable 'Silicon' prefix. And each is more placeless than the last, predicated on a generic model of development

that could not possibly have less to do with the actual political, economic or material conditions obtaining in any African society”.

Egypt’s new capital is no exception. Although as is typical of state planning the precise mechanics remain unclear, we are told the *madīna zhakīyya* will be ‘connected’ and ‘integrated’; a knowledge hub “modelled on Dubai, Singapore and China” coordinated by the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, EAF, Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Interior (Sout al-Omma, 2018). As well as its green credentials, ACUD’s Ahmed Zaki Abdin has stated that the city will be free from crime, as “all of the streets of the capital will be monitored through solar-powered cameras dispersed everywhere which prevents the possibility of committing illegal acts” (Hammad, 2018). Policemen will not even be needed for directing traffic; this can be achieved via electronic road sensors and street-side display boards coordinated by a central control headquarters. Minister of Communications and Information Technology Amr Talaat recently announced that the new capital will be the nation’s first cashless city in order to “encourage e-commerce... and make Egypt a regional hub for such cross-world industry and for the mounting global growth for these trade activities” (Ahram Online, 2019). A ‘Knowledge City’ within the new capital will support this, hosting centres for research and entrepreneurship with a focus on digital innovation and artificial intelligence to stimulate local enterprise with an international reach. As one real estate developer in Cairo remarked, smart cities are “the new thing in Europe and the United States. So potential overseas buyers will likely gravitate toward them” (Hafez, 2018).

A domestic tech industry and smart urbanism initiatives can thus be seen as a twenty-first century marker of global city status. Denis names ecology in Egyptian state-led

development as a “radically imported category that accompanies the processes of economic liberalisation” (2006, 65). Smart urbanism also occupies this role, only more emphatically – digital innovation may have the capacity to produce solutions but remains fundamentally driven by private profit and its free market contextualities must be critically examined. Smart urbanism’s insistence that its organisational logics of connectivity and remoteness can optimise urban administration and the lived experience (as well as economic growth) emerges from the alliance between neoliberal politics and global tech corporations that seek to reorganise models of national government. This facilitates the withering of state architecture to provide for civic needs and the privatisation of public space and services. The techno-politics of the smart city narrative provides a modern solution to overcrowding and pollution in the same breath that it this condemns the old city (and the populations that inhabit it) as pathologically ungovernable. Discussions of wealth redistribution and welfare provision are abandoned to perpetual poverty – rather than reform the old, simply rebuild anew. Erasure of state failures to provide adequate urban solutions is once more asserted.

True, false, probability and success thus become conceptually malleable within the techno-political frame of the smart city rhetoric – an extension of Dubaisation’s hollow aestheticism, or development visions governed by the politics of pixels. Indeed, the failure of the digital-utopian vision is a distinct possibility if development is not grounded in nor address local contingencies. For example, maintaining airconditioned interiors for glass skyscrapers not built for desert sun requires huge amounts of energy and a green space double the size of Central Park needs water to thrive. The city’s location beyond the fertile Nile Valley which supplies 97-percent of the nation’s drinking supply means water will need to be diverted from Cairo and nearby satellite cities to serve it (Michaelson, 2018). The United Nations predicts severe water shortages for Egypt by 2025: Chinese money to

build new pipelines able to monitor drainage flows is meaningless if no water will run through them (BBC News, 2018). Similarly, for all the integrated digital connectivity of the *madīna zhakīyya*, Egypt experiences some of the slowest internet connection speeds in the world—according to a recent survey (Dhiraj, 2018) it ranks 170th out of 200 nations—which reduce further when the government orders the four main internet service providers shut down during periods of civil unrest. Egypt’s existing homegrown technology initiatives are mixed, but all showcase the same themes of social exclusion built into their materiality – the Smart Village gated business park (incidentally, modelled after Dubai Internet City, itself inspired by California’s Silicon Valley and its south-east Asian imitators [Elsheshtawy, 2006]) lies half empty in the desert near Sheikh Zayed City, and Downtown’s GrEEK Campus although more successful, is an elite space of private security guards and higher education – a new administrative capital Knowledge City will be similar. Likewise, that a cashless economy precludes participation for those without access to digital technology, reinforcing class-based exclusionary networks of interaction and commerce, appears less important than the pursuit of indicators of globality.

F. Chapter Conclusion

The case of Cairo’s new-build redevelopments and the New Administrative Capital can be considered a culminative expression of dynamic local and global paradigms that have shaped modern Egypt and the city’s urban policies. To understand the proclivity for building new settlements in the desert—a enduring principle of governmental development policy—Egypt as a militarised nation whose armed forces and associated impenetrable state bodies such as NUCA exploit significant inroads into the national economy must be understood. Egypt joins a list of states such as Brazil, Pakistan and Indonesia where the entrepreneurialism of their respective armed and security forces increasingly shapes

national markets and distributions of wealth. Emerging from this is a form of militarised capitalism, where the free-market principles of privatisation and foreign investment are tempered by closed economic and political networks of elite military and business nepotism, blurring the line between public and private capital.

Mega-construction and urban development are central to this model. They have provided opportunities for profit and strategic foreign partnerships since *infītāh*'s ideological bridgehead, combined with an abundance of land resources and the allure of prestige mega-projects. The latter can also be recognised as a manifestation of state-propagated 'global city' rhetoric, whereby both the New Administrative Capital and planned redevelopment of Cairo are touted as a material assertion of Egyptian presence and worth on the global stage and destination for foreign capital. This is visually realised in the dramatic modern architectures of scale and stature, drawing on Dubai's subjectivity as a successful Arab economic centre of power and normative technological narratives of 'smart' and environmentally-cognisant urbanism driven by profit-seeking global technology companies, which function as a seductive shorthand for prosperity, particularly within a developing economy and African city context. These structures of globality in turn emerge from globalised concepts of lifestyle and consumerist-driven notions of identity and status realised in architectural form – the dissipation of elite exclusionary spatial forms such as the gated compound, high-end mall and luxury hotels which draw on superficial markers of cosmopolitanism bound to capitalist behaviours. The paranoid post-revolutionary security state generates social appraisals based on spatial occupation: visibility in the public sphere is recast with risk and suspicion liable to punitive redress, inevitably linked with class identity and consumer habits which overwrite any other claims

of belonging or Lefebvrian notions of the right to the city. This follows Paul Amar's (2018) thesis on the 'para-populism' of military political economies:

“Today, much of the traditional “private sector” has become a military or paramilitary sector dominated by security logics. Unlike classic populist projects, these mega-scale security logics are not primarily oriented toward public safety or national patrimony but to infrastructures and projects that favor the interests of the titans of the private sector and investor classes. I refer to such projects as “parapopulist” political economies, rather than as populist regimes in the 20th century sense, which were oriented toward the development of state and public industries. Though these new parapopulist projects purport to be for “the people” and “the nation,” they are not truly populist, because even if they do trigger a brief boom in construction jobs, they do not offer a future for the vast majority of “the people,” as clients, laborers, or masses, as substantive beneficiaries of these developments. In fact, this new generation of mega constructions emerges from the sand and stretches into the sky unencumbered by production sector targets or population-serving aims.” (84)

The redevelopment of Cairo, NUCA towns and the New Administrative Capital are demonstrative ciphers for this parapopulist perversity – the claims to improve quality of life through population relocation and de-densification via ex nihilo settlements obscures state responsibility to locate solutions to poverty and exclusion embodied in the extant cityscape. Provision of low-cost housing does not match residents' needs, or account for or improve upon the operational functionality of urban informality. Rather, state planning lies in thrall to a politics of pixels whereby material conditions can be discounted in favour

of dislocated fantasy. A lucrative real-estate sector based on supply-side economics allows a small cadre of military and favoured business elites to benefit from desert development, despite the failures of previous NUCA towns to meet their stated aim of rehousing populations.

However, the current administration should not be misread as merely a return to ‘Mubarak-era’ politics, despite the continuation in urban development policies and military figureheads. Under President Sisi’s rule the EAF has captured the nation’s political and economic apparatus to a greater degree than before, building on the fundamental rupture to its internal workings incipient in the post-Camp David period. By moving beyond a purely defence-focused mandate, the EAF has taken on new roles as investor, contractor and developer of the natural and urban commons. Mubarak-era projects such as the SHP or Cairo 2050 and their logics endure, sometimes under different names, but with an increased political will and capacity to carry plans to fruition at the cost of widespread civil dispossession from the urban environment. Unlike previous NUCA settlements, the New Administrative Capital mega-project represents an unprecedented abandonment of the existing city and its inhabitants and transfer to private sector municipal provision. A bunkerisation of the symbols of government away from sites of public circulation such as Downtown and Tahrir Square demonstrate the regime’s intention for self-preservation in the light of the popular mobilisation of 2011, which in turn, convinces foreign partners that the EAF remains a stable business partner. Whilst preventing a return of widespread anti-government protest remains a paramount government concern, the regime has simultaneously appropriated both the EAF’s revolutionary role as an ally of the people and the post-2011 legacy of political instability to amplify claims of their singular competence and guardianship of the nation. Following the recent approval of the aforementioned

constitutional amendments, the EAF's influence appears set to further expand over civil society. This will build on platforms of control established by the EAF's expanding economic and urban activities. Given the security logics and lack of transparency inherent within a military-dominated political class, this does not bode well for a democratic and equitable Egyptian future.

IV. Conclusion

Contemporary government development in Cairo's urban environment presents numerous paradoxical and conflicting planning logics. Identifying an up-to-date definitively-named comprehensive government development schematic is challenging, but can be seen as largely a continuation of projects and state rationales first proposed in President Hosni Mubarak's Cairo 2050 vision in 2008. Current urban development in the Greater Cairo Region can be considered through post-2011 policies such as the securitisation of Downtown, the clearance of street vendors and crackdowns on certain cultural and social sites of public interaction, or the pledge to 'make Egypt slum-free' by 2019. It includes varied initiatives such as the preservation of historic *belle époque*

Downtown, NUCA's desert developments (including the New Administrative Capital), or the Social Housing Project's one million new housing units and the Informal Settlements Development Fund. These projects represent a confluence of private, foreign and state capital and influence that are shaping the city's built environment; the latter of which is increasingly appropriated and manipulated by the Egyptian Armed Forces as its military-capitalist activities expand under the authorship of President Abd al-Fatah al-Sisi, as demonstrated by ACUD or EAAF's construction portfolios, or the manifold military-private business enterprises closed to public scrutiny.

Narratives of a new global city for a modern Egypt are prominent in the government and marketing rhetoric that accompany this development. This can be examined through the lens of Egypt's history of politicised urbanism which reflects the search of successive administrations for local and international legitimacy asserted through a built environment that intimates Cairo as the prime agent of Egypt's global modern. In contemporary Egypt the effects of growing transnational interconnectivity and neoliberal economic policies must also be considered against this. Ingresses of foreign capital and new international relationships alongside globalised notions of lifestyle and consumer identities emerging from *infītāḥ* and late-twentieth century globalisation have tangibly influenced a changing Cairene cityscape. The structures of globality found in the construction booms of malls, compounds and international franchises reflect consumer-orientated interpretations of cosmopolitanism and modernity. Compounds and housing estates bear aspirational international monikers and Cairo's own extant heritage areas are rebuilt anew, conveying a fatalistic abandonment of the existing city as irretrievably lost or unworthy.

Much of Cairo's current development reflects an aesthetication of contemporary global economic success as inspired the cityscapes of Dubai, Abu Dhabi or Singapore – structures of stature and luxury that promise achievement and the good life writ in gleaming glass and air-conditioned interiors. The New Administrative Capital trait-making mega-project is particularly illustrative in this regard, boasting the tallest towers, green living, and the techno-politics of smart urbanism – the ultimate twenty-first century intimation of global city aspiration. These confluences of the perceived global modern, which Cairo's political urbanism and intellectual communities have long navigated, are interpreted differently with regards to the Al Ismaelia for Real Estate Investment company's regeneration of Khedival Downtown, but the end result is similar to its hyper-modern counterparts. Al Ismaelia claims an authentic reassertion of a specifically Egyptian identity expressed through its preservation of the area's *belle époque* heritage and celebration of Downtown's history as a locus of Cairene arts and culture. Its development initiatives betray a progressive neoliberal stance that forwards inclusive identity-based rhetoric whilst privileging an audience defined by its social currency and spending power, underpinned by selectively idealised readings of colonial nostalgia and Khedive Isma'il's Europhilia. Aesthetic differences aside, *belle époque* nostalgification and hyper-modern Dubaification variations on Cairo's urban transformation thus interpret development in the same way – an inorganic imagining of constructed cultures and their associated behaviours, dislocated from Cairene reality that prevents the majority of citizens from asserting their right to the city and overwrites any other claims of belonging or histories of resistance. The hollow quality to these development logics rings true through all of the urban initiatives considered by this thesis.

For example, NUCA's commitment to constructing new-build cities over the past forty years has consistently and dramatically failed to attract the numbers of new residents that their housing units could potentially accommodate. Yet, the imperative of desert expansion remains central to state development planning, driven by the EAF's ownership over almost all of Egypt's land and the opportunities this presents for private profit. Elite business interests appear to be the driving force in behind these projects, inflected with myopic readings of Cairene realities and pragmatic usability. Illustrative in this regard is the almost compulsive drive to construct more luxury hotels to add to Cairo's growing list of semi-vacant five-star establishments that feature in almost every iteration of government development planning. Although the tourist industry in Egypt is slowly recovering since the revolution, it does not possess the same capacity to attract international tourists as it did prior to 2011, and the sector is strongest in the country's beach resorts that capitalise on package deals and budget flights for foreign visitors. Semi-frequent terrorist attacks on foreign visitors (the most recent being an attack on a tourist bus near the Pyramids injuring 14 people in May 2019; a similar attack killed 4 tourists in Giza in December 2018) and a political climate that is making it more difficult to acquire tourist extension and expatriate business visas, alongside closing international NGOs, imprisoning foreign journalists, deporting academics and murdering foreign graduate students suggests new hotels are not the most effective solution to increasing the city's tourist footfall. The New Administrative Capital in particular appears to embody these unworkable designs of Egypt's state visionaries. Apart from removing government institutions away from potential sites of civil protest, the city appears to offer little practicality in terms of business, residential or leisure functions accessible to Egyptian citizens or outside visitors. Its spiraling cost and the operational challenges of running a city in the middle of the desert are further compounded

by the growing reticence of international developers from China and the UAE to financially commit to the project.

These developments thus deal in a desperate, fragile form of futurity – expressed not only through architectural aesthetics of the hyper-modern, but also the speculative nature of real estate that promotes and sells its unbuilt product through the promises of graphic design, or the vast public debts accrued by projects such as the New Administrative Capital that will be born by Egyptian citizens in years to come. Dubai as an emulative model is an optical illusion that the Egyptian government refuses to glance at more than once – it sees only its economic success intimated by urban forms, without adjusting the image to consider the infrastructure, industry and multicultural human capital development that the Emirati city's prosperity is predicated upon. In comparison, the globality of Cairo's current urban development is brittle, conceding style to substance and elite aspirations to practical need.

These contradictory development logics are also evident at the other end of the spectrum in state-led planning to confront Cairo's degraded urban environment and its consequences for rising urban poverty. Initiatives such as Sisi's pledge to make Egypt 'slum-free' appear to address these issues only at surface level. New state housing projects do not meet the needs of '*ashwā'īyyāt*' residents relocated there, demonstrating a fundamental government misunderstanding or deliberate ignorance of the logic of informal areas where citizens have developed community networks and businesses that maintain many livelihoods. Citizen resistance opposing eviction or authentic participatory planning processes such as Madd Platform's Maspero Triangle project are cast aside, belying the post-2011 assertion of a new mode of urban citizenship. Claims to decongest the crowded

city centre by removing its government institutions are teleologically dubious, given that most government employees do not own vehicles and concurrent plans to develop a new central business district nearby suggests increased traffic and visitation. Developing dilapidated formal areas such as Downtown to improve the conditions for residents and business owners is stymied by the government's failure to adequately reform antiquated rental laws that discourage building renovation.

Inherent to these state failures to address Cairo's urban climacteric is a pronounced disregard for citizen wellbeing. Unlike the mega-projects and housing initiatives of Nasserite Egypt, the urban development of Sisi's Egypt appears divested of any infrastructural strategy or practical social content. The spectre of the 2011 uprising looms large in regime mentalities, as demonstrated by Sisi's War Against Terror that appears to have turned inward towards the general population as a source of threat and cause for paranoia. Mindsets of social repression have been inscribed in urban form, expressed in varied architectures of exclusion that perpetuate politicised and moralised social commentary on the spaces of contemporary Cairo and those that frequent them. The securitisation of Downtown that normalises the built environment as an arena of security risk means the wrong combination of class identity and public presence is cast as grounds for state suspicion, particularly regarding the symbolically contested spaces of the *'ahwa*, certain cultural institutions, or Tahrir Square. Conversely, the gated compounds, high-end malls and entertainment complexes that collapse lifestyle experiences into impenetrable elite spaces provide a perverse freedom from both Cairo's urban hardships and illiberal state oversight for those than can access them. Whether only reachable by car, guarded by private security, or the softer modalities of elevated consumer and cultural spaces (in the case of Al Ismaelia's Downtown restoration), legitimacy and belonging is based on a class-

based category of belonging deemed deserving of a private sanctuary in the city to call home.

President Abd al-Fatah al-Sisi and the military-political regime as the saviours of the Egyptian nation appears to unravel in the face of these planning logic paradoxes and divisive urban visions for Cairo's future. Alongside an increasingly punitive security state, a burgeoning military capitalism that has coalesced around a supply-side real estate sector devoid of social provision looks set to produce a double burden of negatively inverse societal returns, by creating more urban problems than it solves and shifting a mounting public debt onto the backs of the Egyptian population. Nor will these state-approved developments propel Cairo to prominent global city status; aesthetic indicators of urban achievement cannot compensate for a missing industrial, business and infrastructural operational core. The question remains as to how long this situation can be sustained.

Constitutional amendments in 2019 extended President Sisi's term of office and the mandate of the EAF to act unilaterally in the nation's political and social affairs. The last general election in March 2018 saw President Sisi retain office with 97-percent of the vote, running against nominal opposition candidate Moussa Mustafa Moussa who openly endorsed his support for the president. However, Sisi's victory came only with the systematic silencing of more legitimate challengers including top military personnel; Colonel Ahmed Konsowa was sentenced to 6 years in jail and Lieutenant General Sami Hafez Anan arrested following their respective announcements to challenge the presidential incumbent (Al Jazeera, 2018a). This demonstrates a small but identifiable unease even within the closed ranks of the EAF itself towards the current regime, despite benefiting from their economic role as preferential parastatal contractors. However, even if a change

of government is precipitated, only a significant shift in the organisation of Egypt's political, economic and military institutions and structures, as well as renunciation of long-held development logics that rely on desert expansion and elite speculative markets will produce equitable change for the course of Cairene urban development. For now, the chance of a new mode of urban citizenship that allows citizens to assert their right to the city and navigate its urban precarities does not look likely to materialise.

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